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BITTER IS THE RIND.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF "BREEZIE LANGTON," "A RACE FOR A WIFE."

"On serre l'orange; on en jette l'écorce."

"Aimons vite
Pensons vite
Tout invite
A vivre vite
Pensons vite
Au galop
Monde falot."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1870.

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BITTER IS THE RIND.

CHAPTER I.

AMONGST THE PARTRIDGES.

ST. HELENS is filled with the usual class of people that congregate in such country houses to celebrate the first of September. There is the country rector, a thorough sportsman all round, who still adheres to the old muzzle-loader, but whose unerring delivery in the field (not pulpit,) stops all irreverent chaff. One or two fast University men, friends of Fortie's, who abhor the sight of pointers, and think fifty brace down between twelve and four with the stubbles driven, keepers and retrievers picking

up behind them and no stopping is what shooting ought to be. Mrs. De Driby is in tremendous force doing the honours, patronizingly, condescendingly, as if she were every inch a duchess's daughter, and the genuine queen of the Manor House. She has had one or two smart skirmishes with her brother-in-law, because he will insist on "that chit of a Moseley girl," as Mrs. Horace designates her, being asked to dinner. She at one time nearly hardened her heart to making Kate's exclusion a condition of her own residence at St. Helens; but on mature reflection refrained, feeling that Sir Giles was not unlikely to ring for her carriage on such occasion.

Fripley Furnival has arrived, brimful of spirits at his escape from London to "green fields and pastures new." Sir Giles is immensely pleased with him, though a little horrified at times at the democratic sentiments with which Fripley is apt to flavour his conversation. But

his quick epigrammatic talk delighteth the Baronet much. Not a day goes by without the interchange of a few passes between those two, and Sir Giles revels at once more crossing swords with a foeman worthy of his steel. He delights in an attack on Young England, more especially when Young England is represented by one so much of his own kidney as Fripley, who retorts with as much cynical venom as the Baronet himself. Sir Giles is ever on the assault, and chuckles with delight at Fripley's dexterous parries and rejoinders, feeling no ill will if his adversary at times gets a little the best of it.

"What, Sir Giles," cries Furnival, as the party are about to adjourn to the smoking-room, "won't you join us? Not be one of the sages who consume the midnight oil?"

"No, I've consumed the midnight oil, and its concomitant the midnight alcohol pretty freely in my time, and very much

to my own detriment, as you also are about to do."

"Nonsense, Sir Giles. Remember I'm a knight of the pen, as old Horace sings,

"Nulla placere diu nec vivere carmina possunt,
Quæ scribuntur aquæ potoribus:"

Nothing really good was ever written by water-drinkers."

"We'll not argue about that," replied the Baronet, with a grim smile; "but the stimulant system, like comets, is brilliant but for a brief period. Feeding the furnace with oil requires capital and constitution."

"Yes, I know," retorted Fripley, shifting his ground, "there are people who look upon the consumption of tobacco as a deadly sin. Convicted of indulgence in cabanas, they await your appearance in the Bankruptcy Court with resignation, and your arrival at the dock with quiet interest. Still, we don't all get to those

ante-chambers of Hades. So good-night, I go to commit all you have preached against."

"I never doubted it, Mr. Furnival," laughed the Baronet. "Good advice mostly hardens people in their iniquities."

"May your days be luminous and your nights noiseless, Sir Giles," retorted Fripley, as he retreated in search of his cigar.

The smoking-room at St. Helens that night was lively in the extreme, Furnival's spirits infected the whole party.

"Fortie, my son," he exclaimed, "your uncle is a brick of the Georgian era, the claret has been unexceptionable, and this cabana is a weed to be revered. Lord! what fun it is getting out of the smoke, and kicking up one's heels in the country. If anybody wants to sing, don't let him check his inclination."

"Jove! Fripley, do you recollect our yachting excursion some years back,"

cried Fortie, "all about the south coast. Don't you remember that fellow among the crew whom we used to have up night after night to sing that 'grog and tobacco' *chanson*."

"Of course, I can call to mind the old burden now,

" 'And 'twas all through the grog, boys,
The jolly, jolly grog;
'Twas all through the grog and tobacco.'"

A temperance ballad to a lively air, setting forth the grief those seductive sedatives had brought him to. I recollect, too, the captain saying from his knowledge of the man they were doubtless practical experiences."

"Practical. Jove, Fripley! that reminds me. Did you fellows ever hear Furnival's story of 'the Cock?' Best practical joke ever was played."

"D—n it, yes, to hear about. If you'd been in it, I fancy you'd have thought it rather the other way on."

“Never mind ;” chorussed the smoking-room. “Give us the benefit of your experiences, as the sailor did.”

“All very well, Bullington; but a fellow don’t generally care about telling the tale of his own discomfiture.” An observation to which a twinkle of the eye and a flickering of the corners of the mouth, gave a decided negative.

“Pooh! fire away, old man;” said Fortie.

“Well, if it must be, so be it; as the man in the farce says. Wait a moment till I’ve mixed some cognac and seltzer. Ah, well!” he exclaimed, after taking a pull at the bucket of soothing sedative he had compounded, “it’s a story of my juvenile days. A long time ago, as they say, I was staying in a mighty pleasant house in the north countree, but a house through which ran a swift current of practical joking. I don’t suppose any of the younger division there ever dreamt of going to bed without, not only a

systematic search between their sheets for foreign substances, but a general inspection of their rooms to boot, to ascertain if they could foresee an insidious attack of any kind. One unfortunate youth I remember in that jolly autumn party, who had been reduced to as near imbecility as may be, by a scientific course of selling and hoaxing. We had so worked upon his mind, that a mere 'good morning' at length was apt to elicit the chuckling rejoinder of 'No, no, it won't do, you don't sell me,' and an invitation to take wine he viewed as a decided pit-fall.

"Well, in the next room to me slept a fellow, never mind his name, but he was a notoriously late riser. Also amongst the members of that pleasant party was a public school-boy, a very incarnation of mischief. One unhappy afternoon he glided up our stairs and paid me a visit. I believe to this day he had some design upon me, but as ill-luck would

have it found me in my room. Ill-luck you will say—undoubtedly, the most fiendish prank he could have played there could never have equalled the hideous Nemesis he eventually evoked. After a little desultory converse we quitted my apartment. My neighbour's door was ajar, he peeped in—nobody there. After a moment's survey he gave a chuckle and said, 'Oh, Lord! here's such a lark to be got out of this if you're game and won't split. Look here, do you see that,' and he pointed out a small trap in the ceiling that evidently led into the roof. 'Mr. So-and-so never can get up in the morning—suppose we help him. We'll put a cock up there. I'll get one to-night, and won't he crow lively about five a.m., oh no, rather.'

"The absurdity of the idea tickled me immensely, and I fell readily into the scheme. My young friend procured next day a most promising young cockerel, and that afternoon he and I got up on chairs,

raised the trap, introduced the bird and went away jubilant. It never occurred to my thick-headed self, that this false roof ran not only over both our rooms but probably more. However, next morning 'bold chanticleer proclaimed the morn' about four, not only over my neighbour's head but also mine, with a vehemence enlivened probably by hunger, that totally defied sleep by any one in that part of the house. Well, this was a deuce of a go. Of course I sympathized with my neighbour, and cordially too. We got the trap open, placed water and barley on the floor and trusted to lure him down. Not a bit, that infernal bird was as shy as golden plover in winter time. Come down he wouldn't. He was 'all there' every morning to greet the sun with pæans of rejoicing, though how he could know it had, or was about to arise, up in that roof seemed mystery dark and inscrutable—amenable to the ordinary wants of poultry he wasn't. It was agony; sleep was an

impossibility soon after four, there never was such a cock for doing

“‘ Salutation to the morn.’

Every description of inducement was laid out for the brute on the floor of the room. Chopped meat, chopped egg, everything we could ever hear that poultry most affected. We read up all the culinary authorities of the barn-door fowl. We concocted the daintiest dishes known in their Francatelli. All in vain, he wouldn't come down and he would crow. As for me, I was nearly distraught. Grouse shooting hard all day, a lively house in which you seldom saw your bedroom till past one, and this infernal bird practising his octaves soon after four. My neighbour, a man of the world a good deal older than myself, calmly declined to shoot, and did his sleep in the afternoons in the library, but for me as a young one there was no such escape. Shoot of course I couldn't, and the chaff

ran strong against my shortcomings in that respect. Merciless were the sarcasms about my waste of cartridges, while 'my respects to the cock,' which always greeted my departure from the smoking-room was hard to bear. The ladies, of course, were all in the joke by this, and many were the mock congratulations we received about 'our being favoured with the nightingale so far north,' &c. Luckily for us, at last that demoniacal cock found his way over the ladies part of the house. Then of course, there was a row. A slater was sent for, a hole made in the roof, and that awful bird was captured. But this had lasted a week, and I was clean worn out for want of sleep. How the deuce the brute lived nobody ever could make out."

"Yes," said Bullington meditatively, "practical joking is like the boomerang of the natives in Australia, which is apt to recoil severely on the unexperienced practioner."

“Ah,” said the sporting rector, who had been smoking quietly during Fripley’s narrative, “I recollect in my younger days making an early start from a pleasant country house, and hurriedly plunging into a great coat the sleeves of which had been sewn up with a raw egg at the bottom of each. We don’t swear in the church, but I’m afraid I ejaculated ‘bless me’ with unnecessary vehemence that morning.”

“Jove!” said Fortie, “I should think so, what a mess you must have been in.”

“Well I’ve a dim recollection that I was, rather—I know I all but missed the coach.”

“Time for bed,” said Bullington, “if we sit up late we shan’t shoot straight to-morrow. One of your best beats, isn’t it, Fortie? anyways Sir Giles said so.”

“Yes, come along; here are the candles,” and with divers good nights, the party separated.

Unceasing is the war waged against the partridges. There are two parties out nearly everyday, and numberless slain attest the skill of the performers. Moseley begins to feel easier about 'the church close,' the hares on which have had a bad time of it lately. Furnival is delighted with old Jackson, and has made him tell the legend of Piers Thornton over three times, with a view of utilizing it as a melodrama for a transpontine theatre. This, conjoined with tolerably accurate shooting on Fripley's part, has made him an immense favourite with the old keeper, and Fortie already chaffs Jackson upon unduly favouring Furnival with regard to place.

"Aye, he's a nice gentleman," responds Jackson, "he shoots as straight as you do yourself Mr. Fortie, and he's a thought quicker than you are."

A short bag rather tickles the Baronet, who never fails to appear to see the

game laid out and counted. "Carrying out the great principle of war, gentlemen, I see," he observed, on an occasion when the prognostications of the morning had been by no means realized, "in which the slain bear an absurd ratio to the cartridges expended. I should like to know what the destruction of life costs per unit in a great war, or in the present instance what partridges stand us in a brace."

"Well, there was a good bit of wind, and birds were wild—the shooting was by no means bad for the day," rejoined Fortie.

"Oh, Sir Giles," cried Furnival, "this will never do, you must generalize. No statistics hold water drawn from particular occasions. Take the average from the first. Deduct the amount of top dressing given to the soil in the shape of cartridge cases and unappropriated lead, the Norfolk men say nothing brings such crops, and that wherever it has failed, it has

been because there were not enough birds to draw forth the top dressing."

"Ingenious, Mr. Furnival," smiled the Baronet. "Why the devil didn't they make you a lawyer?"

"Want of assurance, and no power of reply," laughed Fripley, "or else with my talent the woolsack was imminent."

"A proof that Providence still occasionally watches over the destiny of the nation. However, assiduous application has done much to correct those deficiencies."

"Sir Giles, you are too good. I must go in for some sherry and seltzer with which to wash down such delicious flattery."

Mrs. De Driby, too, was quite enraptured with Fripley. "Clever creature," she said, "it is quite an intellectual banquet to talk to him, he quite draws me out of myself, and evolves all the

lower depths; no, I mean the higher elevations that is to say, the finer chords—you understand what I mean, Giles—of my nature.”

Fripley certainly did draw her out, and it is to be questioned whether he or the Baronet derived the greater delectation from the process. The good lady was a source of much mirth to that irreverent crew. Upon one occasion, she chanced to come in late upon a great discussion on the approaching St. Leger. Her assumed anguish upon hearing that Lady Sophie had quite broke down, amused them much. She inquired quite plaintively.

“Lady Sophie who?”

“My dear Mrs. De Driby,” rejoined Fripley, “you are laughing at us. Every one knows such a favourite as Lady Sophie, whom not to know is to argue yourself unknown.”

Mrs Horace was completely silenced, and dedicated a whole morning to turn-

ing over all the Lady Sophies in the peerage, which afforded her but meagre information. The tragic tones in which Fripley informed her one morning that he regretted to see Sir Roland was still coughing, was also a source of great trouble to her. It was evident that the whole table knew all about Sir Roland, so that to inquire Sir Roland who? was not to be thought of, while a morning at the baronetage proved as unsatisfactory as that at the peerage had been in Lady Sophie's case. You must remember the good lady was honestly as ignorant of stable as of Comte's philosophy, and as little likely to admit it.

Still Mrs. Horace was immensely pleased with her position at St. Helens, and felt she dispensed the hospitalities thereof with great magnificence.

"Fortie, my son," remarked Furnival, one morning, as they lounged on the

terrace in quiet enjoyment of a cigar. "That little Moseley girl is deuced pretty and clever. I rather had an idea in town that you were 'spoons' on Lizzie Jerningham, but your proceedings here perplex me."

"In what way?" inquired Fortie, puffing vigorously at his cabana.

"Hum! Well, old fellow, I am not straight-laced, but there's a medium; I don't see why you should make *two* nice girls unhappy about your precious self!"

"What has put that absurd idea into your head?"

"Observation. I don't mean to say you're good-looking, though you're not half ugly enough to make money as a show. But your ideas of committing the amiable are of high conception and don't require practice. It strikes me you are making great play in both quarters. I don't want to preach, but

both girls deserve better treatment than that—let alone the precious kettle of hot water you'll upset about your own ears if you don't mind."

"Don't be a fool, Fripley. Lizzie Jer-ningham and I are sworn allies and nothing more. As for the other, *c'est une autre chose*—"

Furnival said nothing, but smoked on in silence.

"Puzzled, eh!" resumed Merrington. "So am I—you may as well know all about it, I know you won't talk. I am engaged to marry Kate Moseley."

"Weugh!" whistled Fripley. "Sort of thing to please Sir Giles. Ever thought of that, Master Fortie?"

"Yes—that's where it is; I don't know how the devil my uncle will take it."

"Don't you? sorry for your innocence. He will probably wish you health and happiness, and request that you will select the workhouse, to which you

must inevitably retreat, in some distant county."

"Pshaw! don't be absurd."

"Come, I like that; you're open to the retort of 'thou also,' I fancy. Will you oblige me by the faintest possible sketch of how you intend to live? I presume the lady has nothing."

"My dear Furnival, I haven't the slightest intention of marrying at present. I shall settle down to something at last."

"You had better make it pretty soon. You'd find nearly anything cheaper than the whist and unlimited loo you settled down to last season. You kept in too with the very worst of a not particularly steady lot. Were you hit very hard, Fortie?"

"Never mind, enough to induce a respect for a five-pound note all the way to Christmas. But you admire Kate Moseley, why don't you congratulate me on having won her?"

“Pretty subject of gratulation. I don’t know which to pity most, but of course it should be her. There can be no earthly chance of your ever marrying, and the dissectors of such cases say the woman always suffers most on such occasions. You’re not the sort to make money to keep a wife on—neither am I you’ll say. You’re right young un, I also suffer from infirmity of purpose, but at all events am prudent enough to rely on my exertions no further than as regards my own bread and cheese.”

“You’re a nice comforter;” rejoined Fortie, “but I’ll not give up Katie without a struggle.”

“Quite right, my boy, she’s worth it; but you don’t show any signs of taking your coat off. Sitting on the side of life’s river, and wondering whether it’s cold or not don’t advance you much.”

“You’re right, and after Christmas I shall run up to town, and set to work in earnest.”

“At what—whist or écarté?”

“Pooh; I shall have made up my mind by then, you’ll see.”

“Take care you have. If you’re ever to do anything, it’s getting time you chose a line.”

“What, still lingering?” cried the Baronet, from the dining-room window.

“I can quite fancy it—after yesterday’s shooting, it seems like disturbing the birds for nothing, doesn’t it?”

“Sir Giles, you are wounding me on my most sensitive point. I can shoot—I don’t hesitate to say so. I once killed thirty-nine consecutive pigeons at eight-and-twenty yards. They were all pinioned, and I kept on shooting till I had done it.”

“I am so sorry Jackson has not received proper instructions;” laughed the Baronet.

“Ah, never mind, he’s promised if I don’t get on well, I am to wind up in the

pheasantry, and have license to kill anything that moves. Hope you will join us at lunch, till then *au revoir*."

CHAPTER II.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

DESPITE the shooting, despite the calls made upon him in his capacity of host, for he was to a certain extent enacting the *rôle* of eldest son. Fortie contrived to get down to the red-brick house by the river, and steal half an hour with Katie pretty often during those pleasant autumn days. He saw her constantly too at the numerous dinner parties at the Manor House, but between the keen eyes of his uncle and Mrs. De Driby, and the calm saturnine glance of his cousin, Fortie did not dare to prosecute those opportunities. He knew his aunt's dislike to the girl. It didn't require Fripley to tell

him that though Sir Giles might laugh at a flirtation, he would view serious intentions in a very different light. He had, moreover, a sort of undefined feeling—nothing to justify it, mind—that there was danger in those cold black eyes of his cousin's. We have all felt that inexplicable feeling of distrust, so incomprehensible at times that we can but define it as sheer instinct. Yet that instinct seldom misleads. In Fortie's case we know more than he did, and may consequently well suppose the observations of the Reverend Horace were likely to be more inimical to his love in the long run than either of the others.

Moseley too, that shrewd old man whose whole soul seemed given to business and the scraping together of money, was getting perturbed about Fortie's visits. He troubled his head little about such things generally, but now they touched his pet lamb he also began to watch Fortie's comings and goings

keenly. His love for Kate was the one great humanizer of the man. Take that away and he was but a hard money-making machine who did his grinding in an agricultural country. He was hard upon the tenants, as he had to be in the interests of his ever needy master. He was cold and unrelenting in the prosecution of his own little speculations.

“Ye must just bide by your bargain,” he’d say. “Ye’d not be for giving a bit back if it had gone against me. When money’s due it must be paid—it’s just business—and it’s no use asking time from me. If ye don’t pay, I’ll have to proceed against you. I’m very sorry for you, but every one knows no allowance is ever given ’mongst business folk. If we all waited on each other till convenient, there’d be no trade doing at all.” Cold, hard and unscrupulous and saving, yet when it touched upon his daughter he was the reverse.

He would lavish money to gratify her slightest whim.

“Mind ye’ve all you want, girl,” he’d say, “I’ll be mostly able to find ten or twenty pounds for your fripperies and whimsies. I want my little girl to be dressed as well as the best of them up there.”

Under these circumstances, and bearing in mind Kate’s French education and natural taste, it may be supposed that that young lady fully held her own amongst the higher born dames at St. Helens. As for Kate, the coquette has faded out of her a good deal since she has been genuinely in love. It mostly does in such cases, it may be perchance to return when the provoking sylph wakes from her day dream; and if that has been rudely dispelled, *en garde* my brethren. There is no such merciless woman breathing, as she who has been fairly worsted in such tourneys. As well hope for pity from a Malay

running a muck, a half drowning man clinging to a spar unable to sustain two, or the man who jumps over you in the hunting field when hounds are running. No, the coquette that has been 'hit,' is vengeful as an Indian on the war track.

But Katie is far more alive to the perils of their engagement than her lover. That young sybarite thinks it quite sufficient to lounge at her feet, bask in the sunshine of her eyes, murmur soft things to her, mutter really sincere apologies for not having dared to be more devoted at the Manor House, and snatch as many kisses from her lips as he can induce her to yield on leaving. I wonder what he would have thought, could he have heard Katie's passionate mutterings as he left her one evening, as she stood by the side of the stream watching his tall figure disappear in the distance.

"Fool! yes, I'm a fool! why do I love

him so. Is it only because he loves me; ah! who can say; they say love is blind—nonsense, I can see his faults and all too clearly; I know all his want of purpose; I know all his folly, and yet," she murmured, "I do love him dearly; that very careless nonchalance and indifference which is his bane—yes, I love that. He will never make his way. I don't see how he's ever to marry me. I'm a fool to think of it, yet I love him," and the flushed face softened, a drop glittered 'neath the long lashes and the light summer storm was past.

I dare say Kate Moseley is by no means the first young woman through whose mind similar misgivings have past, regarding the wisdom of her choice. Girls will insist on marrying *mauvais sujets*, despite the warning of their natural protectors and guardians. They are told it all, they can't ever shut their own eyes to it; but there never yet was woman in love, who

did not believe that she could turn the object of her adoration from the error of his ways, if he was but once entirely hers. Though there are few of them but could, from their own experience, educe cases to the contrary, it is a creed unswervingly believed in by the majority of the sex.

I opine, myself, it is the natural compassion, instinct in women's nature, for our male shortcomings, and their implicit belief in their own powers of proselytizing. They are very fond of the theory that man's recklessness is the result of disappointment in love, instead of being the fruits of uncontrolled passions and entire want of bone in his character. They first pity and then love those children of a gristle formation, and wind up, sweet innocents, by thinking that they are to be the medium of their salvation. The bitterness they have witnessed in their sister's cups deters them not an iota.

Yes, Kate is all too shrewd not to

fathom the want of depth in her lover's character. She grinds her little white teeth sometimes, as she thinks over it all, and upbraids herself for letting her heart go so rashly out of her own keeping. She knows now, that she did not love Fortie really when she accepted him. It is but of late that she has learnt what love means. She intends to talk so severely and sensibly to him the next time she sees him, but it all ends invariably in the same way. So many minutes of those indescribable nothings, a long lingering parting, interspersed with kisses, and regrets after he has left her that she did not say what she had intended. Ah, it is these partings that give such zest to courtship; it is the want of them that perhaps gives a little flatness to matrimony. The cold-blooded monster that could deliberately time how long it would take to say good bye in those roseate days, in which he was himself stricken, I should trust does not

exist, but accident once put me in possession of an approximation thereto.

In a part of Her Majesty's empire, which has lately received the title of "the Dominion," the inclemency of the winter necessitates extreme measures to keep out the cold. Houses are provided with double windows, and I may say double doors; that is every domicile is provided with a porch, the outer doors of which as well as the inner are kept closed during the reign of the ice king. Many and various are the diversions by which the gay inhabitants cheat that long interregnum of frost and snow, but none, perhaps, are in higher favour than that of dancing. Wrapped in their furs, they flit in and out of each other's residences, and regarding the cold still January orb of Diana, in the light of "the young May moon," think

"The best of all ways
To lengthen their days,

Is to steal a few hours from night, my love."

It is customary on these occasions for the ladies to be escorted home by their cavaliers of the evening. That she is at least the object of the night's devotion to whom the gallant devotes himself, I need scarcely observe, but oftimes he has worshipped long, and burnt much incense at the shrine. What wonder that when the moon shines bright, and the stars glitter in the clear, still, frosty air, when the snow crunches crisp under the mocassin, and "the Power of Love Valses" are yet ringing in their ears, people walk home leisurely on such occasion.

It had been the best dance of the season in a noted city of those parts. The prettiest girl of the many pretty girls that had valsed hard that evening—and there were blooming flowers, too, in that *parterre*—strolled leisurely homewards under escort. Her cavalier was one not given to neglect his opportunities in this world. Few men more keenly

appreciated the *beaux moments* of life. What wonder they walked slowly? Some fifty yards or so behind strolled another pair, but in this instance they both appertained to the male sex, and were consoling themselves for the want of damsels to protect, by sucking steadily at their large cabanas.

“Shocking flirt, that little Ritsom; chucked me over clean that last valse, so that she might walk home with Gifford,” observed one of the smokers.

“Wouldn’t have been a flirt, I suppose, if she’d chucked him over to walk home with you? By Jove! he’s making the most of it, and quite right too; however, that’s her door.”

Yes, the dreaded portal was reached at last, slowly as the twain had proceeded. The gentleman holds open the swing outer door for his companion to pass through, and then follows himself to ring the bell to summon the servants to open the inner. The outer door swings

to, shutting upon about a yard of white tarlatan dress.

That graceless pair, with a slight snigger, sit down on an opposite doorstep, and watch that piece of tarlatan with considerable interest. Their cigars wax low, for very near a quarter of an hour elapses before the lady inside discovers *that her dress has caught*. I suppose the bell would not ring.

Katie comes in from the garden, whence she has been watching the retreating form of her lover, as with his pet, vagrant-looking retriever at his heels, he wends his way along the stream back to the Manor House. Her father eyes her keenly as she enters. For the last half-hour he has been sitting in that quaint old arm-chair by the window, wrapped in thought. He holds the stem of a long clay pipe between his fingers, from which he occasionally inhales a meditative whiff or two; but Katie, thoroughly conversant of her father's

ways, sees at a glance that he is thinking seriously over some subject or other. The girl walks quietly across to her piano, and begins to wander over the keys. She plays nicely and with spirit. She can please if she cannot entrance her hearers. She has a good ear, and has been well taught. Add to this, the rare faculty of justly appraising her own powers, and it can be easily conceived that Kate was better worth hearing than artists of more pretension. The girl was clever, and overrated herself seldom on any point. The converse of this is so much more frequently the case, that attempting what lies well within our capabilities is comparatively rare. The musical gems consecrated by Patti, Lucca, &c., are so incessantly served up to us, diluted and adulterated, that a little music is apt to produce a panic amid drawing-rooms in these days. Every one plays, and every one places implicit confidence in their powers of ren-

dering anything. Sufficient cackling oftentimes selleth the addled egg to advantage.

Katie wanders over the keys dreamily at first; but anon her spirits rise, and she drifts into some of that old Scotch music she loves so well. "Coming through the rye" melts into "Whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad," and then with a crash on the instrument, she calls out gaily.

"Now, father, we must have your old favourite," and trills out that most humorous of all Scotch songs, "The Laird o' Cockpen," with all the *espièglerie* of her nature.

Birkett Moseley's face relaxes, as he listens to his especial fancy of all his daughter's *repertoire*. It carries him back to the days when he had first brought home the bonnie Scotch lassie he had loved so well, little thinking how soon she was fated to leave him. Eh, she used to sing that to him, and that was how it came about that Kate had

learned to love and sing all those old Scotch songs. In her childish days, she had been at times in custody of her Scotch aunts, so that she had imbibed enough of the accent to render such songs properly, and steer clear of the error attributed, as the old story goes, to the young English lady who discoursed though musically, neither truthfully nor politely of "The Bony Lasses." As she finished with—

"As yet there's nae chickens appeared at Cockpen,"

she shut the instrument, and crossing the room said,

"You look serious, father; it is time for supper. Shall I ring?"

"No, girl, not yet, sit down, I want to talk to ye."

Whatever ideas Katie might have regarding the forthcoming conversation, she kept them to herself, and awaited patiently till her father should become more explicit.

"Mr. Fortie comes down to see you a good deal, I'm thinking, Katie!" remarked Birkett Moseley at last.

"Yes, we are old friends, you know. Don't you recollect he used always to take me out fishing with him when he came home from Eton?"

"But ye've both grown up since then, and things are different like."

"Of course, that's the reason we don't go fishing together now."

"Tut, child, how cute ye're getting. If you don't go fishing with him, he comes here a good deal. May be you call it gardening now, though I'm doubting if it's quite as safe for you these times as it was 'lang syne!'"

"What do you mean, father?" inquired Katie, as her cheeks flushed.

"That's just what I haven't rightly thought out yet. Young men of Mr. Fortie's age are apt to talk a deal or nonsense to girls of yours, and girls are sometimes silly enough to believe all they

are told. You're over young, Katie, to be able to take proper care of yourself. You're handsome, child, and no doubt Mr. Fortie tells you so. Have you common sense enough to prevent its turning your head. If not, ye'll have a sore heart of it some day, unless you consent to bide quietly at home with me, and give up all them junketings at the Manor House."

"Oh, father! you wouldn't be so unkind as to forbid me the only amusement and pleasure I have?"

"I'd forbid ye nothing, darling, unless it was for your own good. I forbid ye nothing now. I only warn you, Katie, not to trust your heart to any of they gay springalds up there. Ye're not of their class, child; they'd win your affections, and away they go, and you'll not see them again for ages. I love you too well, lass, to say aught about shan't do that and ye shan't do this; but I'm just thinking maybe it'll be

best ye bide a wee quietly with me, instead of junketing up there with our betters. Ye maun do as ye like, but I think ye'd best take your old father's advice."

"I can't, indeed I can't!" she replied, coming over to him, and seating herself on a low stool at his feet. "I promised to go up there to-morrow to dinner."

"Promised! promised who?"

"Fort—Mr. Merrington, I couldn't help it, he insisted."

"Does Mrs. De Driby ever insist?"

"No, but Sir Giles often presses me to join their dinner; and, as you know, father, invariably gives me a message for you."

"Yes, yes, the Baronet's kind in his way, he mostly is till he's crossed; the nethermost pit's bare deep enough then for the offender. But look here, Katie, answer me this. Did Mr. Fortie ever tell ye he loved ye?"

The girl hesitated, her eyes dropped, and her cheeks flushed. What was she to say. She was truthful and honest by nature ; but she had promised her lover to keep their engagement secret.

“I don’t know, I can hardly say,” she stammered painfully.

“Stop !” said Moseley, sternly, “don’t lie, girl. Say honestly yes or no, or, father, I’ll not tell you. Your mother, Kate, scorned a liar and so do I.”

Kate Moseley sprang from her stool, and stood erect.

“You are right, father, and your daughter, too, scorns to lie. As far as may be, you shall know all. Fortie has told me he loves me, and I—I love him. What’ll come of it I don’t know ; but I fear, alas ! more than I hope. Don’t call me foolish—I know I am ; I can’t help it—I love him.”

Answer forsooth for all folly that women ever committed.

“Hum. Did he ever ask you to marry him, Kate?” and Birkett peered eagerly and inquisitively into his daughter’s face.

She had thrown herself down into an arm-chair, as she finished her passionate speech, and turned her head away as her father asked the above question.

She hid her face for a few moments, then reared her head proudly, and the blue eyes met his anxious glance boldly and defiantly.

“Father,” she said, “you bade me not lie, I never will to you, but I can’t answer that question.”

“Good, Katie; I’ll not press ye. It’s not all inquisitiveness, child, but you’ve no mother and you’re all I have. I’ve nought but you left to care for after all these years. You’re very precious to me, darling, and should harm come to you or aught separate us, well then I’m thinking the sooner it’s all over with me the better,” and Birkett Moseley’s tones

became almost plaintive as he finished his speech.

“Don’t I know it—don’t I feel it?” cried the girl, as she sprang towards him, and threw her arms round his neck. “But trust me;” she said, kissing him. “Father, dear!” she whispered, as she laid her head upon his shoulder, “you’ve been everything to me, but you’ve made a lady of me, and educated me out of the station to which I was born. I am not repining—pray don’t think so, but it makes life hard for me just now. Have a little patience with me—and,” here she slid from his embrace and knelt on the floor by his knee, “believe in me as long as I can look fairly in your face, and say that there is nothing I am ashamed to tell you if I might, as I do this minute.”

“It would be a sore hour for me, girl, should I ever doubt your truth. God bless you, lass; I am afraid your sowing but bitter seed for yourself the while. We’ll

say no more about it, Katie; but come weal come woe, ye'll trust your old father ever, won't you?"

"Ever, for ever;" quoted the girl, unconsciously, as she rose to her feet.

CHAPTER III.

KATE BETRAYS HERSELF.

HORACE DE DRIBY is a man by no means devoid of patience. Few men can bide their opportunity more tranquilly than the Rector. If all this time he is so quiescent and rather shuns the Manor House than otherwise, it is because he has thoroughly mastered that great rule of the game of life to wit, "never hurry the *andante*." So many games in this world are lost from want of attention to that simple maxim. It so constantly happens our adversary would revoke or throw down his cards if we did but accord him time. But no, it is a broad principle of the nineteenth century that we must be always progressing—

always moving. Do something, they cry—never mind what! even when it is palpably your interest to sit and smoke silently till your adversary, or fate, has made his next move on your life's tangled check board. "There's a time to get and a time to lose," quoth the preacher, but we list not to the wisdom of past ages. A feverish want of time is one of the characteristics of the day.

But though Horace De Driby is perfectly cool and patient, he is not altogether pleased at the strides Merrington is making in Sir Giles's good graces. He can but perceive that Fortie is encouraged to act at St. Helens quite as if heir to the property, while he himself visits there as mere Rector of the parish. He has not much to put against this—those "promises to pay" of his necessitous cousin that he is gradually acquiring possession of, may become useful by-and-by, but in his present frame of mind Sir Giles is more likely to discharge them

with a sneer than be much exasperated thereby. Horace had studied his uncle pretty closely for some years; he had begun in the first instance, much in the way we all study those with whom we are destined to live on intimate terms, or be in any way dependent upon. But to his keen intellect it soon became a subject of deep interest. He thoroughly dissected Sir Giles's character, and in pursuance of, and as a furtherance to, this end, a good many of his immediate neighbours besides.

A curious and many sided character this uncle of his—with his polished cynicism, masking the fierce, vindictive, irritable temperament beneath, withal as keen a reader of men as Horace De Driby himself, and perhaps with as clear a perception of his reverend nephew, as the latter had of him. But on one point the nephew was the shrewder, Sir Giles was wont to gauge men with a too contemptuous arrogance,

and after short study to think he had fathomed them. Horace was a more careful analyst, and continued his dissection of their minds and nature as long as they figured on the stage of his world. His uncle, on the contrary, drew his conclusions and adhered thereto. Alike in many points, they differed in some. Sir Giles disguised nothing of the worst side of himself, only the best. Horace the reverse. Not much good perhaps to be said of either of them—more arrogance and irritability in the uncle, more hypocrisy and craft in the nephew. Relentless in their projects, both. Vindictive in the extreme to those that should cross them therein; yet again showing it in different types. Sir Giles would prosecute those that crossed him with fierce unforgiving animosity. Horace said nothing, but they must be swept from his path.

Horace De Driby, after much consider-

ation, had quite come to the conclusion that the sooner he could make a move against Fortie Merrington the better. Sir Giles, always partial, was getting a great deal too fond of him.

The Baronet was not a young man, and although Horace had but little doubt of Fortie's ruining himself in Sir Giles' eyes before very long, yet if Sir Giles came to the rescue with supplies, Fortie might last some considerable time in high favour—the crisis in short might come too late. “Moreover,” he argued, “an old man like my uncle, with no other ties, is apt to hold strongly by the last tendril that winds itself round his battered heart. A few months more, and what would now suffice to destroy Fortie will prove innocuous. And yet these bills are not sufficient. If he had but chosen a *post obit*—elderly men get wrath as a rule when they find their death speculated upon. And in this proper and christ-

ian-like spirit Horace De Driby thought he might as well go for a stroll. Little did he think as he put on his hat, that the card he wanted was about to be placed in his hands.

Kate Moseley trips along the river bank this morning with *riante* lips and springy footsteps. Kate's little foot presses the turf lightly at any time; as with Olivia,

“The flower she trod on dipt and rose,
And turned to look at her;”

but she feels now as though she could fairly dance along. Love's quicksilver is coursing through her veins, imparting soft languor to her deep blue eyes and a pleasant flutter to her heart strings, and though in her calmer moments she is aware that her future path will not be strewn with roses, who'd think of briars and nettles this bonnie October day. Do you know that charming madrigal of Leigh Hunt's,

“Jenny kiss’d me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in.
Time, you thief! who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in.
Say I’m weary; say I’m sad;
Say that health and wealth have missed me;
Say I’m growing old; but add—
Jenny kissed me.”

Fortie loved her, and she shut her eyes resolutely to aught else. Kate, of course, had known Horace De Driby from her childhood, but had never liked him. In her younger days she had looked upon the cold, dark, grave, stern man with awe—of late he had inspired her with an instinctive aversion which she would have been puzzled to account for. It is always thus; your sympathetic natures though they enter into and blend so much with other people’s dispositions in the aggregate, when they do meet with a repellent, either shrink back like the sensitive plant, or curl themselves up with bristles outwards like the hedgehog, according as they may

be weak or determinate of character. Katie I am afraid was of the hedgehog type.

Musing, with a sunny smile on her bright young face, over the golden hour she had passed but yesterday with her lover, she is suddenly conscious of a quick step behind her. As she turns, Horace De Driby overtakes her and lifts his hat in salutation. No help for it, he is going her way, and in common courtesy they must needs tread it some short distance in company. Had he met instead of overtaken her, Horace would, probably, have passed by with a bow, and a conversation fraught with much pain, and productive of much anguish to Kate would have been avoided. Malignant chance that caused the Rector to turn to his left instead of his right on leaving home that morning—who shall predict the finality of causes?

“You have been very gay at the Manor

House lately, Miss Moseley," remarked Horace.

"Sir Giles has got the house full of people to shoot, and there have been some pleasant dinner-parties. We don't often get beyond that in the country, you know."

"No, but I have heard rumours of dances in the evenings, and all sorts of gaieties of that description."

"Oh, yes, we have danced after dinner sometimes, and once or twice Mr. Furnival has contrived to get up charades."

"In which I hear Miss Moseley proved a real acquisition."

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Kate, "Mr. Furnival took a deal of trouble to teach me, and they were all very kind, and said I did well; but except when I had a little bit of singing to do, I am afraid my laurels were due more to the kindness of my audience, than any talent of my own."

"You sing well?" inquired Horace.

“Oh, Mr. De Driby, how can you ask such a question? No, I wish my vanity would allow me to say yes. I can sing a few little things fairly I know; but—”

“Your vanity has allowed you to admit that much then,” interrupted Horace, with a slight cynical inflection of the voice that was not lost upon his companion.

“One would fain believe that there are some things one can do,” she replied, with just a shade of defiance in her tones.

“No one can doubt Miss Moseley’s talents who has the pleasure of her acquaintance; but before we part, will you, in all kindness and sincerity, allow me to just hint at one of the few things it would be more prudent she should not do?”

“I don’t understand you, Mr. De Driby,” replied Kate, the blue eyes open with astonishment.

“I would merely suggest that you are a little imprudent in walking so much by the river with my cousin Fortie. It is a censorious world, and a country village is no whit behind its bigger neighbours in talking scandal.”

If his advice was unpleasantly expressed, still it was honestly given. Horace had no ulterior design in thus speaking. Kate Moseley had as yet not been reckoned as of account in his game. He thought it a pity the girl should be made a fool of by Fortie. An idle flirtation of this kind was calculated to do her more harm than she reckoned on. Already he was aware that gossip had been rather busy about those walks by the river. It was only his duty and a kindness to give her a hint.

“And what scandal, pray, can attach to my walking with Mr. Merrington?” inquired Kate, after a pause of some moments.

Not quite such an easy interrogatory

to reply to this last. Horace was taken aback to find the girl so utterly ignore the inferiority of her station.

“You don’t answer me, Mr. De Driby,” continued Kate, and as she spoke her usually *mutine* mouth hardened with a set expression seldom seen there. “I presume a lady may walk with a gentleman, without giving the world occasion to be censorious as you call it.”

Horace was not only astonished but nettled. He had dropped a good-natured hint, and this chit of a school-girl, (such he still deemed her), was presuming to argue the point with him.

“You are wilfully ignoring my meaning, Miss Moseley. You understood me quite sufficiently without compelling me to explain myself further. Good morning.”

“Stop, Mr. De Driby,” cried the girl, in clear resolute tones. “You have gone too far, or not far enough. You will oblige me by speaking out.”

“Good! since you will have it so. I had thought to drop a word of advice without hurting your feelings. You insist upon its being otherwise. Don’t blame me if you find the acquisition of knowledge unpalatable. You pretend to be ignorant of what gossip says when a young lady in your station of life takes long strolls with a man her superior in the social scale.”

Katie’s eyes sparkled with indignation. Her love for Fortie made her cruelly sensitive to any allusion to her somewhat lowly origin.

Gulping down her wrath, she retorted, mockingly, “Ah! true; I forgot the gulf between us. I should have recollected that.”

The gibe irritated Horace still more, and it was in a harsh, biting voice he replied,

“You will do well to bear it in mind henceforth. A woman’s reputation should never be questioned. Falsely though it

be, you run the risk of being talked about."

"You have heard me talked about?" inquired Kate.

"Undoubtedly I have heard some gossip, or I should have hardly felt authorised to speak to you on such a subject."

"And did you contradict such infamous scandal as it deserved?" said the girl vehemently, her flushed cheeks and quivering lips showing that the passion so sternly suppressed had at length mastered her. "You did not stand by and hear a helpless girl traduced in silence? Speak, sir!"

"Miss Moseley, when you have lived as long as I have, you will understand that a man's vindication of a woman's character is generally her condemnation."

"*Lâche !*" hissed Kate between her little white teeth. "I can trust, I think, though to Mr. Merrington to

curb the tongues of any such slanderers."

Horace's dark eyes glittered fiercely. He did not quite catch the opprobrious French epithet, but he was equally indignant at the turn things had taken. It was in his most bitter mood that he rejoined:—

"I have tried to give you good counsel, Miss Moseley; you reject it. Your good name is in little danger so far, but it is for you to take care of it for the future. To stifle gossip is not so easy as you imagine. You had better follow my advice, and above all discard any romantic notion of Fortie Merrington being of any use to you on the occasion."

"And why should he not?"

"Psha! you talk childishly. What can Fortie do against shadowy rumour, in the first place? What pretext can he have for interfering in your behalf, in the second?"

"The best of all!" cried Kate, stung out of all self-control by his contemptuous manner. "He is bound to defend the good name of his affianced wife!"

For a moment, Horace De Driby stood dumb-founded; then recovering himself, he raised his hat, and said,

"The knowledge of that fact would have spared me this painful conversation. I can't conceive why you didn't mention it in the first instance. Pray allow me to offer my congratulations;" and, bowing low, he passed on his way.

Katie stood spell bound, gazing after him as the storm of her passion passed away. Quick then came reflection. What had she done? Had not Fortie adjured her to keep their engagement secret, and had she not betrayed it to one from whom, of all others, she felt it should have been concealed. Once more she saw the ironical smile with

which Horace had offered his congratulations. How dared people in the neighbourhood presume to spy upon and criticise her actions, and here Katie stamped her little foot upon the ground and the tears came into her eyes. Better she had not been brought up a lady, she thought, and then Fortie would never have noticed her. "Ah, not that," her face softened, and a smile played upon her lips. "Fortie loves me," she murmured.

Only a weak foolish girl after all, you see, tasting the first bitterness of mixing in society above her station. Society will take care to burn the heinousness of that offence pretty deeply into her mind before it has done with her. Wait till society is made aware of this presumptuous love of hers, and see if, in the form of Mrs. De Driby and some few others *sui generis*, full measure is not meted out for her transgressions. Caste is an absurd

Brahminical institution existing only in Asia. Civilized Europe knows naught of such superstition. Is it not so?

But now Katie's quick brains began to ponder over what she had best do under these circumstances. Her secret had escaped her. The word spoken cannot be recalled, as we are all so constantly reminded to our sorrow. Clearly, Fortie must be acquainted with her folly as soon as possible. Yes, he only could decide what was to be done. She must go home at once, perhaps he would look in this afternoon, and then she could tell him all, if not, she would write and confess the scrape her rashness had led her into.

CHAPTER IV.

A BITTER QUARREL.

HORACE DE DRIBY walks on, still somewhat bewildered by Katie's announcement. His shrewd calculating brain is already busy turning over this new combination of the cards. Had the girl spoke truth. Yes, undoubtedly, as far as her own belief went. But then again, though she might deem herself engaged to Fortie, it did not quite follow that his cousin considered himself committed that length by his imprudent flirtation. Girls of that class, he thought, are so apt to overrate and exaggerate the idle compliments paid to their pretty faces by men in rank above them. Supposing it really was so,

what use could he make of the intelligence.

Horace De Driby here fell into a very commonplace error, he argued from generalities to particulars. Knowing that the over-educated daughters of many of the farmers of his neighbourhood were weak, vain, foolish damsels, with a breeding up that fitted them neither for the kitchen nor the parlour, but left them like Mahomet's coffin midway in an undefined land, where there were none to marry them, he made the mistake, not unnatural, of placing Kate in the same category. But even in these cases of semi-education, here and there naturally refined taste and talent will triumph over all the Brummagen gilt and Britannia metal of their bringing up, and a quiet, modest, intelligent girl is the result, whom you would hesitate to say was not of gentle blood. Kate Moseley was not only one of these exceptions, but

her education had been of the best. Keen indeed must have been the eye that could have detected, as she mixed in the society at the Manor House, that she was not to the situation born. Women penetrate each other's masks sooner than men, but no London lady of fashion had fathomed Kate but for the strenuous and unceasing exertions of Mrs. De Driby. To do that excellent lady justice, she took prodigious pains that there should be no mistake about poor Kate. Christianlike, charitable old woman, if she could not succeed in banishing her from the Manor House, was it not still within her power to make Katie's stay there uncomfortable.

"Giles is so eccentric, you know; of course, poor thing, the servants' hall is her proper place; but Giles will have her treated as a lady. Absurd, is it not?"

"A very pretty ladylike girl anyway,"

replied one of these visitors upon some such occasion. "What did you say her father was?"

"Oh, one of Giles' people, I really forget which. I cannot, I own, see what you admire in her," and Mrs. Horace swept away, leaving her visitor to attribute Kate to the lineage of the gamekeeper, gardener, or whom she pleased.

Horace De Driby, you must bear in mind, had seen personally but very little of Kate. His ideas of her were principally derived from his mother's remarks, and what an erroneous conception they would give rise to we are already aware of.

He pondered a good deal over this new intelligence, that he felt he had unwittingly received. He was a man with a set purpose before his eyes, and in the achievement of that purpose would be stopped by no considerations. He had so far no dislike for his cousin, his

feeling towards him was one of contemptuous indifference — might indeed have exerted himself in his behalf in many things, but for the one fatal fact ever present in his mind, that Fortie was likely to rob him of his inheritance. For such, by dwelling continually on his own aim, he had come to look upon any alienation of the St. Helens property from himself. What was this worth to him. If Kate Moseley had not deceived herself by interpreting words of idle gallantry into considerably more than they really meant, he thought his course was pretty clear. Had he known Katie better, he would have had no such misgivings; but he was very far fathoming her character. He had little doubt that he could soon extract the truth from his cousin; but then he mused again that would somewhat cramp his action in the matter. If he learnt it from Fortie's lips, supposing it was true, he would doubtless be pledged to secrecy;

as it stood, he could communicate it to Sir Giles as a thing about which there was no mystery, nay, was even openly announced, at all events on the lady's side. It is true if he first ascertained the truth from Fortie, he could easily take care that it reached Sir Giles' ears through the medium of his mother. But Horace had little faith in his mother's discretion, and preferred playing his own game without assistance as far as possible. If he moved in this wise it were well he moved quickly, he had better explode his shell before any filtering of the rumour should reach his uncle's ears.

Having made up his mind, Horace next day strolled up to the Manor House. As he reached it, that "agreeable creature," as Mrs. De Driby called Furnival, was on the eve of departure. The carriage was at the door while Fripley still bandied words with his host on the steps.

"Good-bye, Mr. Furnival;" said the Baronet, "I have been very glad to have

you here. I trust you will pay us another visit before long, and bring a Mrs. Furnival with you."

"Sir Giles! Sir Giles! don't think so badly of me, as not to believe I have profited by the wisdom that flows from your lips. Don't think I have forgotten your aphorism of last night, 'that women become lost to society when they marry, having exhausted their powers of pleasing in pursuit of that laudable end.' Who am I that I should seek to withdraw woman from her sphere in such wise."

"You a little misquote me," rejoined the Baronet, laughing, "I think I said 'some women.'"

"Ah, and Mrs. Furnival, you think, will be 'the one bright particular star.' I fear to continue the quotation, she is 'still so far above me.'"

"Never despair, sir;" chuckled Sir Giles. "There's no accounting for woman's eccentricities. Mary of Scotland

took a fool and a coward for her first husband."

"Give me a light, Fortie, quick;" said Furnival, as he put a cigar into his mouth, "I am getting the worst of it. Good-bye, old fellow. Once more, good-bye, Sir Giles, and thanks for a pleasant visit. In conclusion I would observe," and here ^{Furnival}Fortie, with a comic twinkle in his eye, paused, and then in Johnsonian manner rolled out, "Incongruity of age is the fashion in matrimony in these times. I shall marry as soon as I can find any one old enough or young enough. Adieu."

"To be plagued with the jealousy of an old woman, or fretted to death by the frivolities of a school-girl," exclaimed the Baronet, as the carriage drove off. "Good-morning, Horace. He's a clever dog that, Fortie. Gad! I like your friend Furnival. He's something like the men of my day, who were as ready with an epigram as a pistol. One did

hear of *bon mots* in those days. Conversation had some salt in it. There were talkers and wits in those times. Now forsooth, a coarse vulgar banter denominated in your glossary 'chaff,' has taken the place of the neat rapier-like repartee, that I can recollect. Bah!" concluded the Baronet, with a shrug of his shoulders and an application to his snuff-box.

"Glad you liked Fripley, uncle; I always thought you would, and now I must be off. Old Jackson is waiting at the top of the park for us, to shoot out those clumps and spinneys," and with a careless nod to his cousin, Fortie strolled off.

Sir Giles led the way into the drawing-room, where Mrs. De Driby and the other ladies were sitting like a feminine conventicle, after the approved manner of an English country-house. Not that the ladies by any means (that is the younger ones) look upon this as the most desirable

way of passing their morning—far from it.

“We have all our crosses,” remarked a pretty woman to me on one occasion, as stifling a yawn she crossed the hall to luncheon. “Our host bears you off occasionally to view the stupendous depths of his under-draining, or consigns you to the pursuit of wild partridges in November. Still I doubt if your mornings can be as dreary as ours.”

She was a woman of much experience in *la vie de château*, and I believed her implicitly.

“My dear Horace!” exclaimed Mrs. De Driby, with considerable inflexion on the ‘dear,’ (she was wont to italicize her conversation) “how good of you to walk over and see me. We are having such a delightful morning. Miss Petersham has been good enough to read that sweet thing of Tennyson’s to us—all about Lady Geraldine, you know where he ‘makes front against the ague, in some new and

horrid land,'” and having favoured the company with this epitome of Mrs. Browning’s poem, Mrs. De Driby smiled sweetly around her.

“Oh, Sir Giles,” cried Miss Petersham, with difficulty suppressing a smile. “What are we to do without Mr. Furnival?”

“Can’t say I pity you. If Miss Petersham had chosen, who can doubt that she might easily have detained him,” replied the Baronet, which considering the flirtation that had taken place between the pair, had been prosecuted with considerable intention on the part of the lady, was to say the least of it uncalled for.

A little more desultory conversation, and Sir Giles announcing that he had letters to write left the room. Horace followed him; and as the door closed behind them said,

“I want to speak to you for a minute about Richardson.”

“Come into my study. What about him?”

“Why, he’s getting old, and has been ailing for some time. He is anxious that his son should succeed him in the farm.”

“I leave these things pretty much to Moseley; but you know the sons always follow the fathers as tenants at St. Helens, unless there’s good reason against it.”

“Yes; however, I told him I’d speak to you. By the way, what do you think of this engagement of Fortie’s?”

“This what?” snapped the Baronet.

“Fortie’s matrimonial engagement.”

“What the devil do you mean? Speak out, man, can’t you?”

“You don’t mean to say you don’t know?”

“Yes I do mean to say so, and you guess pretty well too I don’t,” and here Sir Giles looked keenly, and by no means benignly, at his nephew.

“Well, I thought of course he had told you. When the lady gives it out publicly it can’t be looked upon as a secret.”

“I presume, sir, you will come to it at last. Your intention doubtless is that if I don’t know, I shall.”

“Good gracious! it’s no concern of mine, I’m sorry to see Fortie make such a foolish match, that’s all,” and Horace rose as if offended, and about to go.

There was an evil smile on the Baronet’s face, and the veins in his forehead swelled with suppressed passion, as he remarked suavely, “You’ll be kind enough to sit down again, and tell me all you know.”

Horace De Driby hated his uncle; though never forgetting the end he had all along in view, he could not resist, when opportunity offered, sometimes goading him to madness. On the whole, I am not sure that this did not stand him in better stead than more obsequious conduct. The old man disliked him, and no efforts of Horace could have effaced that feeling. But if he disliked, he still in his secret heart admired a stern, gibing,

cynical nature so near akin to his own. It was the nature of their race, and if there was no love, there was at all events no contempt for the heir to his title. Still Horace was quite shrewd enough to know that he had now got the length of his tether, and moreover had brought his irritable uncle in a very fit frame of mind to hear the information he had to impart.

“All I know amounts to very little,” he said, as he resumed his seat. “Miss Moseley told me of her engagement to Fortie herself.”

“Kate Moseley!” ejaculated the Baronet. “And pray,” he continued, after a moment’s pause, “did she give you any inkling as to where they contemplated setting up house. I am not aware of a cottage to let on the estate just now.”

“I know nothing more than I have told you. You had better ask Fortie for further particulars.”

“I suppose,” sneered the Baronet,

“you were afraid that he might become a competitor for Richardson’s farm.”

“Hardly,” said Horace, rising, “though I fancy he’d find his way to the work-house that way as quickly as any other. Good-bye.”

Sir Giles vouchsafed no reply, and Horace left the room. The old man sat with knit brow gazing into the fire for more than an hour. He was not thinking much of what he had been just told. He was acknowledging to himself that this scapegrace nephew was becoming very dear to him. He thought fondly over that pet sister that had died so many years ago, and left her boy to his guardianship. Yes, people, he knew, were a little afraid of him, but his sunny Jessie never. How like Fortie was to his mother in that respect, he never seemed to care an iota for his anger. Then as he mused on, came the image of his gay, reckless, spendthrift brother-in-law. He conjured up Sefton Merrington as he was

when he first knew him, with a jest ever on his lips. How well he recollected his mad humour. He could see him that fatal evening, or rather morning, at Wattier's, when he rose, long after the sun, a fearful loser, a smile playing about his mouth, and cried, "To paraphrase Francis the First, 'all is lost but our temper.' Here, waiter, I would fain go to bed in charity with all things animate or inanimate. Fill me this faithless dice-box, while I pledge Sir John Harrington, and the victors of the evening," and he tossed off the box of champagne to his conquerors. Yes, he had cared for but few during his life time, had perhaps never loved but Sefton Merrington and his wife. He had tried his best to keep Sefton on his legs, but no limited income could do that; he was *un beau joueur*, and led his thousands against "the bank" as unconcernedly as Napoleon led his against Moscow—the result was very similar.

Sir Giles did not lay very much stress

on the fact of Fortie's engagement. An imprudent flirtation; gone a little too far perhaps, but of course it would come to nothing. He would speak to him about it; the girl deserved better than to be trifled with. Kate was rather a favourite of his; little goose had no business to let her head be turned by Fortie's idle gallantry though—should have known that could mean nothing.

Had Fortie come across his uncle during his softened mood, things might have been different, and this eventful history had never been written; but as we know, he was out shooting, and all the plagues that country gentlemen are subject to, descended on Sir Giles that afternoon. There were summonses and cross summonses applied for, under depositions incoherent and stultified as it is within the power of the rustic mind to render such things; under-keeper with complaint against the

nutters—complaint weak, drivelling and helpless, resolving itself, as such outcry is wont to do, into incapacity for his situation. The deer had got into the flower-garden, leaving golden chair, lobelia, petunias, verbena, &c., in one common wreck. In short, ere the shooting party reached home, Sir Giles had more than recovered his wonted acerbity of temper, and merely wanted opportunity to render himself as disagreeable as his oldest friends could call to mind.

“Tell Mr. Fortie I want to see him in my room before dinner,” had been his injunction to the butler, and in obedience to this message, Fortie tapped lightly at his uncle’s door soon after his return.

“They tell me you want to see me,” he said, as he entered. “We have had a capital day, a couple of teal amongst the slain—early for them isn’t it?”

“Yes; but I didn’t send for you to

hear the results of your day. Sit down and be kind enough to inform me how far you intend to carry this last *bêtise* you have been guilty of?"

"What the deuce is in the wind now," thought Fortie, his mind running ominously on several oblong pieces of stamped paper, that were graced with his autograph. "Can't say," he replied in his habitual *nonchalant* manner, "until you allude a little more specifically as to which of my numerous follies has attracted your attention."

"Don't bandy words with me, sir! I am in no humour for a bad imitation of your friend Mr. Furnival's jesting. I am told you have engaged yourself to be married to some girl on the property."

"Who told you?" inquired Fortie.

"That's neither here nor there—is it true?"

"Hadn't you better wait, till I announce it, before we discuss it."

“As the lady gives it out, I should say no. Are you engaged to that daughter of Moseley’s or not? I can hardly think you such a fool,” and Sir Giles dropped the conclusion of his sentence slowly in his most bitter manner.

“And if I am?” flashed up Fortie. “She’s a good and pretty girl. If I chose to marry her, why shouldn’t I?”

“Because I don’t intend you should make such an ass of yourself.”

“You are talking, Sir Giles, as if I was a schoolboy. You were my guardian, and I am grateful to you for all your kindness. But I am my own master now, and intend to follow my own fancy in such matters.”

“Do you think, sir, I’ll give my consent to such a marriage? If you choose to marry the daughter of one of my servants, you must take the consequence of such a *mésalliance*.”

“Daughter of your servants!” cried

Fortie, furiously. "I met her at your own table, that's all I know; further, that she was the prettiest and most lady-like girl there."

"Enough of this. You will be kind enough to communicate to the lady, in whatever terms you may think fittest, that there must be an end to this foolery."

"I shall do nothing of the kind." (Recollect, he is violently in love, and not yet twenty-two.) "I don't know that your consent is of paramount importance. At all events, I do not deem it a necessity."

"Oh, you don't," said the Baronet, slowly. "Perhaps you will inform me how you mean to live under the circumstances?"

"With your views on the subject, I should think that was a matter with which you had little concern. Time enough, perhaps, when I come to you for assistance."

“I would recommend no waste of time upon that point. Always bear in mind that coming on your parish is more likely to aid your necessities than coming on your uncle. With this domestic difference between us, perhaps the sooner you leave St. Helens the pleasanter it will be for all parties. Pray make my congratulations to your bride elect, with hopes for your mutual prosperity,” and, with a low mocking laugh, Sir Giles turned in his chair, as if the conversation was finished.

Fortie's heart reproached him. He was sorry he had lost his temper so utterly. His uncle had been very kind to him, and he felt he might have argued his cause with more discretion. But Sir Giles had approached the subject in his most dictatorial manner, and spoken most slightly of his betrothed. Fortie's temper was naturally quick. Any way, it was all done now, and there was no more to be said.

He rose, and walked across to his uncle.

“Good-bye. I shall leave this house to-morrow, never to set foot in it again till you write to me to do so. As I said before, I am grateful to you for much past kindness, I might have answered with more deference had you spoken to me less harshly; but it comes to the same thing, I should not have yielded to you in this matter. Will you shake hands?”

“No, sir; it’s not the custom of our race to finish their quarrels in that wise.”

“Then all I can say is, good-bye;” and Fortie left the room.

The dinner at St. Helens that night was gay as ever. Merrington, perhaps, was a little *distract*; but Sir Giles was more caustic and amusing than ever. None could have guessed the bitter quarrel that had passed between the

uncle and nephew; that Fortie's place at the breakfast-table would be vacant, to be resumed—ah, when?

CHAPTER V.

LOVE ME, LOVE MY DOG.

“KEEP silence on the stroke and your temper at all times,” that time-honoured maxim hangs across the door of many a public billiard table, and a fitter text for a homily we do not often come across. Alas, alas! why can’t we keep silence on the stroke, why must we pour out the empty drowthiness of our natures on all critical occasions. Our cackling too is wont to disturb the serenity of others, as the cackling of others destroys ours. “For the times are babbling,” says Göthe, and little good comes of such babbling. When Frederick the Great (*teste* Mr. Carlyle,) received the felicitations of

“the Pompadour” with “*je ne la connais pas*,” he had infinitely better have kept “silence on the stroke — your temper at all times.” *Aye de mi*. Don’t you know the sort of person. With erect front and stony gaze, they behold us floundering about in the gutters and cesspools that our infirmity has betrayed us into. With sardonic smile, and “their temper at all times,” they complacently look on, as we eat the dirt so apt to be consequent on our temporary loss of self-command. Dear me, yes, we all come across these flabby phlegmatic natures in our turn, but one would as soon think of making a confidante of a lamp-post or a jelly-fish. They ought to be all billiard-markers, why cannot they recognise their vocation.

Fortie was up early the next morning, and ordering his things to be put up and sent to the station, as he had unexpectedly to go to town, he left the Manor House before any of the guests

therein had made their appearance. He had made up his mind so far, that he must first see Katie, and then seek Fripley Furnival. It had come home to him now, that it really behoved him to set about earning a living. He already recognized that his slender income was by no means sufficient for a young gentleman of his tastes and disposition, even as a bachelor. How it would go with him as a Benedict was a question he at present only contemplated through a golden haze; that aureated mist in which Providence kindly envelopes impecunious lovers, when they are rich in each other's love and stoop not to the contemplation of their joint aggregate of quarterly ingots.

As he passes through the yard, Bess gives vent to an imploring whimper.

“Jove!” ejaculates her master. “I forgot all about you. I can’t take you to town with me. Stop, I have it, come along, old woman,” and stooping down

he loosened the dog's chain. A few minutes, and he is clear of the park, and has reached the bank of the river, that path that he and Katie have sauntered along so often of late. A breeze was fluttering down a few of the leaves and rippling the water as it danced in the morning sun. One of those days in which the mere fact of existence becomes a sensuous pleasure. When the blood runs riot in our veins, and sympathising with the birds we could sing that we are alive. What matter then on such a morning our worldly prospects do not look particularly bright, as we wend our way to the "lady of our love."

If Fortie had had somewhat sombre visions in the night season, no such clouds oppressed him now. Gaily he drummed with his knuckles on the open door of the cottage, as with *riante* tones he cried.

"Breakfast, breakfast, won't any one

succour a starving fellow-creature?"

The parlour door flew open, and fresh as a rose, Katie stood on the threshold.

"Fortie, dear!" she exclaimed, "how good of you; do come in, I was so anxious to see you."

"Come in, my pet!" he replied, clasping her in his arms and kissing her, "I should hope so. I have come to be fed. Brew oceans of tea, Katie, order toast to be continually making for the next half hour. I have got the most unloverlike of appetites."

The girl smiled as she drew him into the room, and after ringing the bell began to busy herself with re-arranging the *débris* of the breakfast-table.

"Father's gone up to the top meadow," she said, "to see about something or other, but he won't be very long before he's back."

"Oh, you think I've come to see your father, Katie."

“Well, not altogether,” she replied, laughing.

“Quite right, my dear, I have come because hunger compelled me.”

The girl’s blue eyes sparkled as she said, “Only the rites of hospitality must be respected, or you should have nothing to eat, sir, after such a speech as that.”

“Don’t be unchristianlike, give me some tea.”

“Fortie dear, I was so anxious to see you,” she replied, as she poured out his tea. “I have been so foolish, I don’t know how to tell you, but indeed—indeed it was not altogether my fault.”

“Never mind, wait till I have finished my breakfast, and then we’ll go out into the garden and I will hear your confession. If it’s only you’ve been foolish, so have I. I fancy that’s a point we shall always have lots to say to each other about.”

“Oh, but Fortie! I have done what you particularly told me not to.”

“Very naturally. I daresay you’ll do that very often in years to come. I am prepared for all that after you’ve promised ‘to obey,’ don’t expect me to be very much overcome by it beforehand.”

“Don’t be provoking, or you’ll make me angry;” said Kate, but her perturbed face very much belied the assertion.

“There, I have finished now. Come along and tell me all about it, though I fancy I know pretty well already the sum of your offending.”

“You won’t be very angry with me,” said the girl, as they sauntered down the garden-path towards the seat by the river.

“No—stop—no, not unless you’re going to tell me one thing.”

“What’s that?” inquired Katie, anxiously.

“That you don’t love me any longer.”

“Oh, Fortie! don’t be foolish;” and as she spoke, Merrington seated himself

on the rustic bench and drew her close to his side.

“Now what is it?”

“Well, you know you told me to keep our engagement secret, and I promised you I would, I have broken my promise. No, don’t speak,” she cried, putting her hand on his mouth. “Listen, till I tell you all. I met Mr. De Driby the other day, he spoke to me about walking with you—harshly, ah, he always speaks harshly—he said when men in your station walked with girls in mine that our characters suffered for it, he hinted that scandal was busy with my name. I lost my temper, and said that you would right me; he scoffed at the idea, and said you could have no pretext for defending me. He made me mad with his cold callous advice, and in the heat of my passion I said that you had fair pretext enough in defending the name of your affianced wife,” and as she finished, Kate hid her flushed face on her lover’s breast.

“Hum, I suppose it was he told Sir Giles then,” said Fortie, musingly.

“Does Sir Giles know?” cried Kate, disengaging herself from him with a start, her eyes open, and her face aghast at such a supposition.

“Come here, you foolish girl; what is there to be frightened at—sit down quietly,” and Merrington once more drew her to his side. “Yes, Sir Giles does know it, and, don’t like it—hush, Katie—I can’t say I ever thought he would, though I intended to spare his feelings a little longer. But it comes to the same thing, he was bound to know it sooner or later, and wouldn’t have been a bit better pleased with it whenever he happened to hear of it.”

“Oh, Fortie!” said Katie, looking shyly up at him “What did he say?”

“Can’t recollect the whole of it, there was forcible language, I am sorry to say, on both sides; but he abused you, pet, and then my temper rather went and I

said more than I intended. However the upshot of it lies in a nutshell. I have got notice to leave St. Helens at my earliest convenience, and the broadest possible hint not to trouble it again."

"And this is all on my account," murmured the girl, as the tears rose in her eyes.

"Well, yes; I suppose you are the primary cause just now; but we were always perfectly safe to quarrel before long, you know. Sir Giles does with everybody, and my temper is by no means angelic. D—n it, he ordered me to tell you our engagement was all balderdash, as if he was one's king, pope and progenitor all in one."

"But what are we to do, Fortie?" said Katie.

"Do—well, I suppose our health won't suffer much even if we don't visit at the Manor House. I am going up to town this afternoon to begin with. I will write you my plans from there."

“Ah!” said Kate slowly, “this is the beginning. I told you they’d never let me marry you.”

“Let—Jove! who has anything to say to it except ourselves. Who’s they I should like to know.”

“Sir Giles and Mrs. De Driby. Stop a moment,” she cried, as brimful of the indignation that the presumption of being under control is apt to produce at two-and-twenty, he started to his feet. “Listen to me, Fortie. I love you dearly, but a woman can see further than a man in a case of this kind. You love me now, I know; but will your love be proof against all the counter influence that will be brought to bear against it. Your relations all estranged from you, filling your ears with idle reports about me—scoffing at the farmer’s daughter, who they will say entangled you. Yes,” she continued, with a sad smile. “I can guess pretty well how Mrs. De Driby will talk about me.”

"Katie, darling," he replied, bending over her. "I am not good at fine speeches. When I asked you to be my wife, I did it because in all sincerity I felt that I should never again care for any one as I did you. I love you more now even than I did then. I'm not much of a catch, goodness knows."

"Stop, Fortie, take me close in your arms," replied the girl, with flushed cheeks and quivering lips, "put your face down to me. When I first told you I'd be your wife," she continued, almost in a whisper, "I don't believe I much cared for you. I thought it would be a fine thing to be a lady, and that you would make me one. Don't turn away from me, that's all past long ago. You have so stole my heart from me now, that I would sooner marry you as a poor man than otherwise. You would be all my own then. You'll not think badly of me for telling you the truth?"

“No,” said Fortie, as he kissed away her tears. “As you admit I’ve won you at last, I’ll not quarrel with you because the conquest was not so easy as I had deemed it. You foolish Katie, to think you would do yourself any good by marrying me.”

Here a low growl from Bess, most faithful of sentinels, warned them that their *tête-à-tête* was about to be disturbed, and Birkett Moseley was speedily descried coming down the walk.

“Run away now, my darling, for ten minutes ; I want to speak to your father,” said Fortie. “Not much to tell him ; but it’s right he should know how matters stand between us.”

Katie’s blue eyes were eloquent with thanks, as with a little nod of her head she left him.

“Good-morning, Moseley ; I’m just off to London, and have come down to say good-bye.”

“Why you’re hardly through with

the shooting yet, Mr. Fortie; indeed, ye haven't touched the big woods, and can't till the leaf's more off. I'se reckon ye'll no be away for long."

"Yes I shall, listen to me: it's likely to be many a long day before I set foot in St. Helens again. Sir Giles and I have quarrelled, in good earnest this time, and it's a quarrel not likely to mend. Don't interrupt—What was it about? Your daughter. How so? Somebody told him I was engaged to marry her, and though we hadn't even told you, somebody was right."

There was silence for some minutes, then Fortie resumed. "Birkett Moseley, will you give her me as a wife, as soon as I've a home to offer her?"

"Eh!" muttered the steward, "here's a pretty brewing of ale. Lord bless me, how is it they will all go blethering about and getting fond of the wrong people. I feared it 'd come to this. Good gracious, Mr. Fortie, why couldn't

you take to keeping company with some one else ?”

“Never mind that; will you give me Katie?”

“Oh lord, oh lord! Mebbe you’d let me know a bit what Sir Giles said?”

“Yes, he said give up St. Helens or Kate Moseley. I resigned the former, some few complimentary speeches, and then we parted.”

“So fond as he was of ye too. It’s a bad job. He’s not one to forgive; they none of ’em do, they’re a vengeful race the De Dribys. Did ye speak him fair, Mr. Fortie, for ye’ve a hot temper of your own, and I’m doubting Sir Giles would try it sorely.”

“No, we parted with bitter words between us. He wouldn’t even shake hands with me when I left.”

“Eh, well. I don’t know what to do. Kate’s good enough for any man; mind, she’s fit for any lord in the land,

my darling is. I like you, Mr. Fortie, always have; I've known you since a boy, and you're an upright honest gentleman; but what are ye to do, if Sir Giles won't hear of it? I doubt it can never be."

"What the devil has Sir Giles got to say to it?" inquired Merrington. "I've turned twenty-one. He's no earthly power over me now."

Old Moseley turned and looked the hot-headed speaker full in the face, with mingled feelings of dismay and admiration. To the veteran steward, the bearding of Sir Giles was a deed of much valour but of much folly. These autocrats of rural districts are by no means uncommon, even when the sway is exercised by men with nothing like the brains or old traditional status of the De Dribys. Moreover, the fierce, relentless character of the family had gone still further to uphold the somewhat despotic power they had so long wielded in the neigh-

bourhood. Though in the olden times they had been ready enough with their swords, it was not so much that. In those good old days people did not make so much fuss about the cutting of throats as they do at present. There were plenty who held life quite as lightly as the most reckless De Driby of them all. No, it was more the crafty brains that characterized the race, the subtle intellect that distilled such refined vengeance, that led to the common saying on the country-side, "Better fall foul of the law than cross a De Driby."

Moseley was much imbued with these feelings. We have already heard him relate one anecdote of Sir Giles, and another of the Baronet's father as testimony that the family were as good haters as of yore. He looked upon Fortie as doomed. Likely enough, from what we know of him, to rush upon his own destruction, without much interference of his uncle.

“Well,” said Moseley, “if you and Katie have made up your minds, I’ll not gain say ye; but ye’re young, ower young yet to talk of coupling; I’m one of those who’d say when a man downright loves a good lass, let him marry her. But you young people, don’t all’ays know your own minds, you’re like the stock in spring time, that’ll break bounds tho’ they’re on the best keep on the farm, and when they’re the wrong side of the fence, are all blethering to get back again; ye think ye love my girl now, but are ye sure that you’ll not get fanciful about another when ye get up London way. It’s like enough, there’s a many do so; they leave the pippin they might have for the picking, to hanker after the medlar that hangs out of reach. My girl, Mr. Fortie, ’s too good to be treated in that sort. She’s wife for any man, and if you’ve a doubt in your mind, ye’d better think no more of her.”

“My dear Moseley,” cried Fortie, “you do me scant justice. If I hadn’t loved Katie more than my life, do you think I’d have risked a quarrel with my uncle. I’ll not give her up for any human being. I’ll wait, I can do nothing else at present; but as soon as I am in a position to marry her, I will, spite of uncles, fathers, or any one else.”

“You’ve real grit,” said Moseley, with a grim smile, “ye talk main like your poor father. Nothing daunted him, when he’d made up his mind. Pity he never made it up more satisfactory like; he never did, I doubt but once, and that was when he married Miss Jessie.”

“But you’ve not answered me all this time,” cried Fortie impatiently.

“Well, I don’t know that there’s a deal to be said; ye maun wait anyway it seems, and it’s best it should be that

way. I'll no stand in your way, if ye both keep in the same mind. But ye don't know Sir Giles, and I'se doubting—"

"Doubting what?"

"He's bad to fight against; I doubt he'll prove too strong for us in the matter."

"Never mind him, Moseley. Promise me you'll not influence Katie against me, come what may."

"Never, lad! as long you're true to her and yourself, there's my hand on it, and no one can ever say Birkett Moseley went back from his word."

"Thanks; ten thousand thanks!" cried Fortie, as he wrung the old man's hand, "and now to say good-bye to Katie."

Moseley looked after him, as he dashed up the walk, with his evil-looking retriever at his heels. "Ah," he muttered, "it depends a good deal on how Sir Giles takes it—mebbe he'll

tell me to go on account of this. It'd be hard too, after living here all these years, and I've been a good servant to him an all, as far as he'd let me. But they none of 'em reck much of that when they're crossed. I've spoke enough about raising money, goodness knows—always the same curt answer, 'If you can't do what you're told, sir, it will necessitate my getting somebody here who can.'"

Fortie in the meanwhile has found Katie in the little parlour, told her the result of his conversation with her father, and is now going through all the sweet anguish of a lover's parting. Bess wariest and most sceptical of dog-kind, ever suspicious of malign influence at work to the detriment of herself, or her master, has stretched herself with her nose between her paws pointed at the doorway.

"Yes, Katie, no doubt about it—Horace told Sir Giles. Wonder why?"

“To injure you, Fortie; I can’t explain it, but my woman’s instinct tells me that Mr. De Driby is no friend to you, nay more, that he would work you harm.”

“Pooh, uonsense! you suspicious little girl. He thought no harm, I dare say; but I must go and wish him good-bye, and ask him about it?”

“Better not,” said Kate, sadly.

“Good-bye, darling,” whispered Fortie, as he once more kissed her. “Oh! stop—one thing more. You must take care of Bess for me. I can’t leave her at the Manor House, nor yet take her to town with me.”

“Thanks, yes; give her me.”

“Come and tie her up then; make friends with her for a few days, although she knows you well already. Still, the first time you let her loose, she’ll gallop up to the Manor House to look after me, but she’s sure to come back when she finds I’m not there. Once more

good-bye, darling!" and snatching another kiss, Fortie Merrington departed for the Rectory.

He found Horace in, and at once apprised him of his quarrel with his uncle and its cause.

"You must have told him," continued Fortie; "and how the deuce could you make such a blunder?"

"Well, it's no use pretending that I didn't; but you see, my dear Fortie, the lady announced it to me as no secret. I thought Sir Giles, if he did not know, a fact of which I was by no means certain, could not fail to hear it in the course of a few hours."

"A fact with a vengeance; but horrible facts
Should be buried in silence, not bruited aloud."

Your Oxford memories might have taught you that," replied Fortie; "that is, if you ever condescended to read Aristophanes in a translation; not that this is a 'horrible fact,' merely an awk-

ward one just now. She told you, because you had been bullying her about me. Jove!" he continued, struck with a sudden idea, "what made you do that? Why the devil didn't you come to me? It was mean of you, Horace, to go and pitch into her, poor child!"

Now, it is an odd thing, and a curious exemplification of that maxim of "silence on the stroke," with which I began this chapter, that Horace, after much cogitation on the subject, had come to the conclusion that for the furtherance of his own interests, it was imperative on him not to be betrayed into a quarrel with his cousin. This interview he had foreseen was highly probable. He had made up his mind they should part friends. Silence, or a merely deprecating answer, and they had done so; but for the life of him he could not resist a sneer. Sarcasm ran in the blood of the De Dribys.

"Poor child!" he replied. "Not quite.

Miss Moseley is as astute a young lady as any with whose acquaintance I am honoured. She can take very good care of herself. Better than you can, Fortie!"

"What do you mean?" rejoined his cousin, hotly.

"Nothing, nothing, excuse me. I merely meant that Miss Moseley is a clever young lady, not to be bullied, as you have the bad taste to term it, by me or anyone else."

"I don't care what you call it. It was the way you attacked her, and indirectly aspersed her character, maddened her beyond endurance, and made her proclaim her engagement with me."

"I gave her some good advice in utter ignorance of the real state of the case," replied Horace, now trying to recover himself. "I told her scandal was so easy to raise, so hard to still. She lost her temper. *Voilà tout.*"

"I don't believe you," retorted Fortie,

fiercely. Now thoroughly up in arms in Katie's behalf. "You hinted all sorts of things that should have been *said* to me. Took a base, mean advantage of your priestly position in short."

"Silence!" returned the Rector. "The sooner you go the better. You are using language I have no intention of submitting to."

"It should be stronger a good deal if you were other than what you are," flashed back Fortie, his blood now thoroughly up. "I'd care but little for the kinship, but social custom protects your cloth."

Horace De Driby smiled grimly, and his dark eyes gleamed as he replied.

"You might recollect the old rejoinder; 'but it shan't protect you, sir.' Men of peace may be driven too far. Go. I'll have no more of this unseemly brawling. Think what you please; but you will surely have the decency to at once leave a house where you are told you are unwelcome."

“Yes, I’ll go,” said poor, rash, inconsiderate Fortie. “Katie was quite right when she said you wished no good to either of us.”

“Hum !” muttered the Rector, as he gazed after Fortie’s retreating figure “so that little minx has dared to interfere in the game, has she. Clever head, too, that girl has. She brought about this quarrel. Well, Miss Moseley, we shall see ; I had not considered you interested much in the case so far. Now I shall take care of you.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUN CLUB.

A BRIGHT June morning. A hansom cab with a grey horse is whirling along best pace down the Knightsbridge Road through Kensington Gore; then turning to its right through an embryo suburban district, through terraces just let but unpapered, through places just finished but unlet, through rows and squares nearly built or but just above ground, past dust heaps and rubbish heaps, and "lots to let upon building lease," till it pulls up at last at an extensive establishment which has not quite made up its mind as to whether it is a public house of pretension, or an inferior hotel. Scores of cabs, prin-

cipally hansoms, are standing all around, the horses munching in their nose bags, the drivers smoking and chatting over various burnished pewters of malt, or the less pretentious noggin of "Old Tom."

From the cab of the grey horse leisurely descend Fortie and the Honourable Jim Halden, both attired in neat shooting jackets and wide-awakes; they cross the road meeting the angle of a high black boarding, in itself suggestive of anything but lively ideas. Making their way round two sides of this enclosure, during which the report of fire-arms constantly assails the air, they enter a narrow wicket, and find themselves in a small grass paddock some four acres or so in extent, and surrounded by the before-mentioned funereal fence. It gives the idea of a cricket ground in deep mourning, but it is not. It is the arena of the Gun Club at Shepherd's Bush.

Passing a large cage in which a few

seedy bipeds are apparently confined, the pair make their way to the centre, not of the ground but of that end of it. Here lounging about, for the most part in dandified shooting attire, are some couple of hundred men, one of whom informs Halden pleasantly *en passant*, that "he's been having a few birds," much in the same way that four or five months later he will enunciate the fact that "he's been having a few oysters." A swell of the languid type, but they can mostly shoot. You see their nerves are steady by virtue of their vocation. When you profess to belong to the *nil admirari* school, it would be too absurd to be ruffled by the escape of a pigeon from a small box.

Some men are lunching in the tent. Some lounging in the chairs. Some making up their books. Here are two of them studying the card of the Handicap. "He is well in, recollect how he shot up last year." "Lost his form

and couldn't kill ducks this." "That's a good man!" "Yes, but he's a yard too far back, he's not quick enough to kill 'em clean at twenty-seven yards." "How are you, Halden, want to back yourself, here's a hundred to three if you like?"

"Thanks, no, Morton; who's favourite?"

"Why a hundred to ten has been taken about Perryman, he's so well in you see; then there's hundreds to eight about three or four of them."

Hampers full of pigeons are displayed in front of the rows of chairs, and beyond them again is a small table, seated at which, with pen and ink and a manuscript-book before him, sits the renowned Offer, purveyor of 'blue rocks,' to the Gun Club, and keeper of the score-book. A little to his left is the mark, distant thirty yards from those queer little boxes (the traps) which, with some six or eight paces between them, are placed in the form

of an arc, equi-distant from each other and the mark. There a curious arrangement of five strings enables the puller to liberate a bird from whatsoever trap he may please. From the mark, straight towards the traps, the ground is again marked by pegs with labels, stating the distance every half yard for nine yards, that is from thirty yards down to twenty-one. From these various distances, as they may be severally handicapped, the competitors have to shoot.

Further back and again to the left, are enclosed a motley crew. Who does not recognise at once in the keen faces and nondescript attire the regular book-makers. For there is money to be made by laying against the gun, as well as by laying against the favourite on the race-course, and the legitimate book-maker knoweth well his mission is to be always laying odds against something or somebody. Here he is in paradise, for he knows all day long he will be taking

odds and still fielding. However its brazen-throated roar has as yet not begun, and the fraternity are busy studying the card of the handicap.

Such is the aspect of Shepherd's Bush on the afternoon of the great aristocratic Derby Handicap.

Seven or eight months have passed since his rupture with Sir Giles, and Fortie has been living about town in nominal pursuit of that phantom 'something to do,' that has worn the heart out of far better and cleverer men than himself. The big city might set up for a personification of Fortune herself. Here she lavishes honours, wealth or perhaps competency; there she bestows just enough to keep body and soul together—starvation—the workhouse—the river. The man of education with a cry of despair throws himself from 'the bridge of sighs' into the cold, dark, bubbling, remorseless water; while Dick Whittington, unoppressed by those advan-

tages becomes Lord Mayor of London.

“ Ah ! it was pitiful;
Midst a whole city full,
Home she had none,”

applies to men as well as to women. God help the well-educated, well-nurtured man or woman who has first to face the great city, and respond to its rough interrogatory of ‘ Well what can you do ? ’ How many of these perish silently year after year who might answer—Lose all hope and die.

I can’t say Fortie, so far, is the least impressed with any apprehensions on this point. Like Mr. Micawber, he trusts complacently “ in something turning up.” In the meantime he has fallen into his old set, and at present labours under the fascinating delusion that man may live by whist and racing. Pigeon shooting he has lately made his special study. He is a good game shot. Are pigeons more difficult—mere knack; these handi-

caps are worth a deal of money. You can back yourself besides. Like the languid gentleman we first encountered, he also has had a few birds and is about to devote the afternoon to landing the Derby Aristocratic Handicap.

As for the Honourable Jim, although to use his own expression "he's no good at pigeons," yet he is seldom absent from any place where the possibility of attaining coin of the realm, whether in small sums or large, seems feasible in his sight. Fortie offered him a seat in his cab, so he also has come on the Micawber principle. Something by the way much more likely to turn up for him than Fortie. For Jim Halden is not only wise in his generation, but as his own friends say a little more than that—unscrupulous would perhaps be a delicate term for it.

But time is now declared up. In stentorian tones, Offer calls "Captain Cherrington!" and a tall, dark, good-

looking fellow steps leisurely down to the twenty-eight yard peg. A few preliminary flourishes of his gun at the shoulder, and dropping it, he says quietly, "Pull." A jerk of the complicated strings, and a pigeon rises from the left hand trap—crack! and ere it is well on the wing it goes down before the Captain's practised barrels. Man follows man in obedience to Offer's summons; some miss, but the majority are deadly. The first two or three rounds of a pigeon match are rather devoid of interest, but as the number of competitors thins, the excitement rapidly increases. Missing two birds makes withdrawing compulsory, so that by the sixth round, instead of the original fifty or sixty, there are not above eight or nine probably left in.

Fortie has been shooting very steadily, and as he steps back after killing his sixth bird, Halden meets him.

"By Jove!" he said, "I never believed

in you a bit, worse luck. D——d if I don't think you'll about win. Have you backed yourself at all?"

"Yes, to win. I took all the hundred to threes I could get, and a hundred to four twice afterwards; though I have not backed my gun each time against the bird."

"The deuce you have. Why, you stand to win a nicish stake."

"Somewhere about seven hundred if I get home," rejoined Fortie.

"Gad! and there goes another out of it," ejaculated Halden, as a pigeon uninjured sped high over the black palings. "Who missed? Perryman, by Jove!"

At the eighth round there are but four still left in. Frantic are the shouts of the bookmakers. "Five-and-twenty to ten about the bird, I'll take." Captain Cherrington cries "Offer," and again a blue rock tumbles to the Captain's practised hand. Mr. Morton, a pale, wiry, sallow-faced man, steps down to

the twenty-seven yard peg, and after a few seconds gives the word to pull. From the centre trap darts a clipper. Missed with the first barrel, it comes fluttering down slowly to the second about twenty yards short of the palings. In dashes the retriever to pick it up; but as the dog nears it, the bird makes another effort, rises and with great difficulty struggles over the palings, these constitute "bounds," and a bird that once gets over them is looked upon as missed. A slight murmur runs round the bystanders at this piece of hard luck.

Mr. Merrington is now called. Fortie steps forward, face calm, lips compressed, "pull!" he ejaculates between his set teeth, and a bird darts like an arrow from the right hand trap. Crack, it is hit hard but still going. Crack again, not touched. Will it reach the palings—almost—it struggles hard, hits them within two feet of the top and falls back dead, inside the fence.

A Mr. Bradley now misses his bird, the excitement is intense—the result lies between Cherrington and Fortie.

Again the Captain answers to his name, “pull!” Crack, crack, and the bird whirls away high in the air above the reach of the guns, even of those who hover on the outside of the enclosure, and are known by the pseudonym of “scouts.”

“All your own way, now, Fortie, my boy,” mutters Halden. “What a *coup*!” But the best men’s nerves rather go under severe tension, whether at billiards, shooting, cricket, rackets, or whatever it may be. It was a big stake, too, for Fortie, and bear in mind that he was but young, and this was his first pigeon match. He felt his lips quiver as he muttered “pull!” and then following the Captain’s example he too missed his bird with both barrels.

Jim Halden said nothing for a few seconds, but eyed Fortie narrowly.

“Look here,” he said at length, “this won’t do. You’ve been upon the strain too long, and your nerves are on the go. Come along with me, and just let me be your trainer. You’ll win yet, though that was a devil of a chance thrown away.” Thus speaking Halden led the way into the marquee, and calling for some brandy, mixed a little with water in a claret glass and handed it to Fortie. “Drink that,” he continued, “it is not strong enough to upset your shooting, but just enough to restore your confidence. Now don’t be in a hurry, be as long as you decently can after your name is called to give your medicine time to act.”

Captain Cherrington; and once more that gentleman steps down to the mark, his handsome dark face calm and placid as ever. He is an old and experienced shot, has won many a big handicap, and is not one whit perturbed although shooting for the great stake of the season.

Pull. Crash, goes the first barrel, the bird half turns over as the shot strikes him, then shoots on again like lightning. Crash, goes the second barrel, again the bird is feathered. "A dead bird!" roar the ring, "Ah, he struggles on still. I'll take four to one about it," yells a leviathan book-maker; the bird just reaches the top of the paling, perches, folds his wings and falls back dead inside the enclosure.

"A miss, by Jove!" ejaculates Halden, "it closed its wings, that bird don't count."

And by the Gun Club rules it does not.

Merrington now advances. "Pull!" and down comes the pigeon in beautiful style, and Fortie is hailed winner of the Grand Aristocratic Derby Handicap at Shepherd's Bush.

"Well done, old fellow!" cries Jim Halden. "Confess I know a little about training now."

“Indeed I will. I was getting so anxious and nervous, I don’t believe I should ever have won it without your judicious assistance. Very hard lines indeed, Cherrington, for you. I’ve no doubt you would have beaten me but for that piece of ill-luck.”

“Not at all,” said the other laughing, “from the vindictive way you cut over the last bird, I fancy you would have been bad to beat for several rounds yet.”

And so finished one of the great gladiatorial representations of modern London.

Yes, modern London assimilates a good deal to the Rome of the Empire. We have no slaves it is true; but we have our great army of Helots for whom we provide workhouse gruel instead of grain, with Fenian processions and monster meetings about wind and emptiness in lieu of the attractions of the arena. Our aristocracy satisfy man’s instinctive

thirst to kill by the destruction of pigeons, instead of the slaughter of wild beasts and their fellow-creatures. A gratifying proof that two thousand or so years of civilization has at least modified some things. We battle over the dogmas of our religion with our ravings about vestments and candles, genuflections and uprisings, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, pretty much as the Fathers of the Church did in those old times at Alexandria. Still religion, as well as other liberty, makes progress. You may differ from Cyril and the monks now-a-days, without sharing the fate of Hypatia. The doctrine of toleration is, however, far from being preached, and Christian charity seems limited to those who are of their own way of thinking. Shall we ever come to the time when the Jew can lie down with the Gentile, and the Mahomedan and Bhuddist be at peace. Who can say?

CHAPTER VII.

KENSINGTON GARDENS.

ANOTHER glorious June day; but the sun this time illumines for us, instead of the funereal precincts of the Gun Club, the grand old trees of Kensington Gardens. Those old oaks, elms, and horse-chesnuts, under which in the beginning of the last century the sparkling Marys of George II's court used to walk and flirt, the brilliant Bellenden, beauteous Lepel, &c. Polished, shrewd, courteous Hervey, I warrant, did much of his love making under these old trees. Do you recollect the last (I think) stanza of his epithalamium,

“ Sure Venus yet never saw bedded
So handsome a beau and a belle,
As when Hervey the handsome was wedded
To the beautiful Molly Lepel.”

From all accounts they were a handsome couple, and handsome couples wax rare now-a-days. Stay, I think I can point you out a pair even now, that can bear looking at. Do you see those two chairs just within sound of the pleasant plash of the fountains. What do you think of that handsome dark girl, in the French grey silk, whose rich masses of blue-black hair render it doubtful whether she even has a bonnet on. Her lithe graceful figure bends over towards her companion's chair, and her brilliant dark eyes sparkle with the earnestness of her talk. He's a tall, blonde, good-looking fellow, at present, intent upon drawing imaginary pictures with his cane upon the soft velvety grass, he is evidently embarrassed by his fair companion's voluble argument.

“Pooh, Lizzie! I shall do well enough, something will turn up shortly, and as I told you I won seven hundred odd over the pigeon-match last Wednesday.”

“And I tell you, Mr. Merrington, you will be ruined; you have got into as bad a set as there is in London, take my word for it. Nay, don’t believe me, what should a woman know of such things? Ask Fripley Furnival, though a woman in my profession can hear a good deal of what goes on in the fast world if she chooses, and as I told you once before I do know of what Mr. Halden is capable.”

Fortie Merrington since his return to town, that is for the last eight months, has been on a very intimate footing with the actress, theirs is a peculiar friendship from various circumstances. In the fast gambling set with whom Fortie was now associated, it may be naturally supposed that he seldom encountered a modest woman. Members of the *demi monde*, demi-reps in character not one whit better, he met continually, and more than one desperate assault had been made upon his heart aided by all the adven-

titious arts a practised *intrigante* could bring to bear. But there is no such safeguard as a pure love on such occasions, and wrapped up in his genuine passion for Kate, Fortie defied all meretricious designs. Lizzie Jerningham was at this period of his career, perhaps the only modest woman on the list of his acquaintance. He had liked and admired her from the beginning, but even then his heart was in Katie's keeping. His gentle manner and courtly deference had touched the actress from the first. Too much accustomed to stand upon the defensive with men of his class, she had been impressed with a homage rendered as only justly her due in contradistinction to the bold admiration so freely bestowed upon her. She had accorded to Fortie favours that she had peremptorily declined in all other cases, she had allowed him to be her constant cavalier in the Park, on such occasions as her professional duties permitted her to indulge in a walk

there. She allowed him to call upon her. What wonder that gossiping tongues began to connect her name with Fortie's. Lizzie Jerningham had been "*sans peur et sans reproche*" so far. Her sisters of the profession, not quite so stainless, could hardly be garrulous enough on the subject, now they fancied they had the opportunity.

And what were Lizzie's own feelings all this time? Insensibly she had been drawn into a great liking for Fortie; but it was not long before her woman's wit fathomed that she had a rival, and it was an easy thing for the actress to extract the story of his engagement from Fortie. She bit her pretty lips on finding how little she was to him, and angrily determined to give him up; but Fortie's blank surprise at her change of manner disarmed her, and so things went on in the old way. Lizzie could no longer shut her eyes to the fact that she cared a great deal too much about Merrington,

and that he, alas! loved her only in a brotherly sort of way. He would throw up almost any engagement to attend her behest; but then he would entertain her with rhapsodies about his Kate. Lizzie's handsome eyes would lighten occasionally at this. What woman whose heart is touched can join in chanting pœans to her rival, yet Fortie's utter ignorance of there being more than friendship between them allayed the storm. His sincere distress if she snubbed him, his anxiety to know the cause of her anger, while it drove this proud passionate woman (and Lizzie was both of these) at times half mad, yet paved the way to reconciliation. Another thing too, was that she knew Fortie was drifting as steadily down hill as it is possible for man to do. He told her himself that she was his good angel, and was perfectly candid to her about his own affairs. She thought that her influence was the only chance of rescuing him from the association of Jim Halden

and his companions. Day after day she felt that her love for him gained ground. She gave him, as far as woman could, good advice, but to little purpose. Had he loved her, she might have broken his chains for him. Better for him perhaps if he had, and much misery and grief would have been spared him. Unfortunately he did not, and though he promised much he performed little.

Often did Lizzie upbraid herself with her folly. "Fool that I am," she would say, "to fret my heart out about a man whose whole thoughts are engrossed by a little country wench and gambling. Yet I am handsome too," she'd say, glancing at the mirror, and pushing back the masses of her dark hair. "Why didn't I know him before that other stole his heart away? She's no better born than I am, he has told me. Oh, Fortie! my darling, you would have loved me then and now you never will. Well, you shall live to own a woman can be disinterested

even when her love is rejected. Men won't believe so, I know; but if any influence of mine can save you it shall, little as you may know what it costs me."

And so those two sit under the fine old Kensington trees. The poor soul crushing down her love, and with rare devotion endeavouring to persuade him to break with his associates and go abroad, or anywhere away from Halden and his dangerous co-mates.

"I know all you say, Lizzie, about going in for something to do is all for my good and so on. Just what Fripley told me last time I saw him. Go into the army—go into anything, but don't go to the devil the way you are going, he said."

"And he was right. You must excuse my not putting it in quite such forcible language as Mr. Furnival's," replied the actress, smiling; "but I mean it quite as much."

"It's all very well, Lizzie, to preach, but it's not quite so easy to do."

"Yes it is;" she retorted quickly. "With energy and resolution you can do anything. Ah! so easy for you men. My career was the only one open for me. What is there for us poor women? Look here, Fortie, I worked long before I got an opening, but I was never discouraged—a little weary with waiting perhaps; but never mind, Fripley made my opening for me. Didn't I work then, I'd an invalid mother to whom luxuries were necessities, as you know. My poor father could make but little enough to keep us on. Well, they say I can act a little now," and Lizzie gave a little toss of her handsome head, as a triumphant smile flashed across her features.

"Jove! you just can;" replied her companion. "But I am doing very well, what with racing, pigeon-shooting, &c., I shall always get along."

"Mad infatuation—even in my short

worldly experience I know what that comes too. I don't go out much, you know, still I do go to Greenwich dinners occasionally, as you may recollect, if you've the grace to recollect anything concerning me. I have sometimes seen these men there who looked upon such things as a livelihood; but I overhear the conversation again next year, and am prompted to ask where is Mr. so-and-so, who was with us last year,

“ ‘Où sont les neiges d'antan ?’ ”

is the invariable response. And so it will be with you, Fortie, if you persist,” and the actress leant back in her chair and gazed dreamily at the plashing fountains. Had she a vision of poor Fortie's fate before her now? Did she picture even then the Nemesis destined so shortly to overtake him? A shiver passes over her countenance—the light dies out of her eyes, and it is in constrained hard unnatural tones that she now addresses him.

“Fortie,” she said, “you’ve told me often you love this yellow-haired girl in the country,” well as she knew it, Lizzie could not utter her rival’s name. “You wish to marry her. Won’t you work for her?”

Again Fortie’s good-humoured face is perturbed. “Of course I shall; I am going to settle down to something shortly. I shall go in for the bar I think, it is the easiest thing to get into. It’s true, Fripley remarked when I told him, ‘and the hardest to get anything out of;’ but every one seems to think I must do something.”

“Yes, and the sooner the better. I do wish you would think over what I have said and leave town. Now take me across to the Bayswater Road, it’s getting late and I must be home in good time. I’m in the first piece to-night.”

They walked across the Gardens in silence. Fortie was moody after the manner of mankind, when they have re-

ceived good but unpalatable advice. As for Lizzie, her reflections were far from pleasant; the man whom she could not but admit that she loved passionately, had lounged by her side the whole afternoon, blind to her love, blind to her beauty, and she felt, deaf to her advice. She had schooled herself to use all her powers to induce him to abandon his career of mad dissipation, and to seek some honest livelihood that might enable him to marry the girl he loved. The actress felt proudly how true she had been to him; but the offering of the sacrifice had been none the less painful. With an inward moan she doubted whether that fair-haired girl down in Lincolnshire loved him as truly and unselfishly as she did. Love is so truly selfish, that there is something touching in the oblation of a first love. Few men and fewer women would have shown such greatness of soul as Lizzie had done this afternoon. It is bitter to men to find that there is one

preferred before them—no better, no wiser perchance than they. But for a woman to find that that beauty which is her armour of offence is powerless, is gall and verjuice.

The Bayswater Road is at last reached. Fortie hails a cab and places the actress in it, as he closed the door she leaned forward from the window, and said in rather tremulous tones.

“Fortie Merrington, you have offered me many a present you know, and I have always refused them. I want you to give me something now.”

“Only too charmed. I have wanted you to choose something you would like often, I never won a *coup* without thinking of you. What shall it be?”

“Get me a plain gold locket with your monogram engraved over one side of it. I want it as a memento of how true a friend I have been to you this afternoon, and please beware of Mr. Halden. Tell him where to drive. Good-bye.” A little

hand cased in pearl-grey kid rested for a moment in Fortie's, and then the cab rolled away.

A woman rarely makes a mistake about a man's love; but the converse of the proposition by no means holds good. The obtuse male intellect constantly fails to detect what woman's modesty impels her to conceal, much as she would fain it may be discovered.

Fortie has never been at St. Helens since he consummated those two bitter quarrels in the space of twenty-four hours. He has never seen Katie since that morning. Long loving letters she writes him, and he responds pretty frequently, though not so much at length. The passion of play weakens all others; when a man is continually absorbed in that fierce thirst for gain, all things else fall flat in comparison. He has wavered no iota in his love or constancy. He curses himself in his better moments, and dashes off letters breathing nothing but devotion; but

though he feels the folly of his career, though he recognises the truth of every word the actress had said to him this sunny afternoon, he knows well that the demon holds him for his own, that his moral fibre is too weakened to shake off the yoke.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE THALAMUS.

IN one of the streets leading off Piccadilly stood a small house, the door of which was never closed till long after the sun had well risen. This was the Thalamus Club. It was not a very decorous institution; it was rather a *lucus a non lucendo*, its very name was a jeer. It was supposed to be as much bed-room, as the pleasant community who constituted it required during the season. Its members were of a most composite order. Actors, authors, fast men about town, &c. Quiet and early frequenters dropped in from eleven till one, to hear the latest gossip and news, for the Thalamus was in full blast from

twelve to anything you might choose to name in the morning. It had no despotical rule about closing. Members left principally by daylight, and nobody, waiters or otherwise, ever disturbed themselves about the gas. I believe it was open in the day-time, and if so must have been a sad sight to see, reminding one a good deal, I should opine, of a tobacco-flavoured mausoleum. But after midnight it was very different; then the latest joke, the newest story were bandied about, and you required to be clever of fence and proof in your armour to hold your own 'mid the chaff of the Thalamus smoking-room.

Clubs, like political measures, constantly arrive at destinies utterly unlooked for by their original promoters. The Thalamus had been in its early days (that is if I may be allowed the supposition that such a nocturnal institution ever had any days) designed as a late club for precisely the above purpose. But an eruption

of new members had given another bias to the club. The old card-room next the smoking-room, originally never invaded except for a modest rubber, was now thronged night after night by a reckless crew who indulged in *baccarat*, unlimited loo, high *écarté* and other unholy devices. Old members shook their heads, the committee expostulated, but the new blood was too strong to be put down. It was now current enough in London that the Thalamus was given to high play. As an old habitué growled out. "Served us right for not pilling that devil Jim Halden. If you made him a canon of St. Paul's, he would establish chicken-hazard in the Chapter House."

Into this pleasant symposium one night sauntered Fripley Furnival. Many were the cordial greetings he received as he made his way to a chair. He was an old and popular member of the guild.

"Why, Fripley my chick," cried Mr. Skeffington, a dramatist of repute, "it's

years since I've seen you; what have you been about? Some say that you've been writing a melodrama for 'the Vic.' others that you had a tragedy accepted at the Surrey, which they had conceived to be a comedy and cast accordingly. Blatherwick there has a capital story of your attending the first rehearsal."

"Trust Blatherwick for having a good story," said Furnival, as he nodded good-humouredly to a stout, florid man on the sofa opposite. "He hasn't seen me so long, I wonder he didn't give an affecting account of my death and burial."

"Would, if I had thought of it," rejoined Blatherwick grinning, "with a circumstantial detail of how you were followed to the grave by a numerous and afflicted circle of friends in *one* mourning-coach."

"Ah! you've got the idea a thought too late," laughed Fripley.

"Never mind, it'll keep and improve. If you stay away from us so long again,

my boy, I'll give them the details of your trial for pocket-picking at Bow Street, with an excerpt of your animated speech in mitigation of penal servitude."

"Well, I've been very busy lately, Blatherwick; console yourself, your Fripley is again about to shine on you."

"When's the new piece coming out," inquired Skeffington.

"Can't quite say. Basinghall promised it should succeed 'The Ball on the Roll,' but then he put something else on and now he's got that on the bill again. Lizzie Jerningham is rather too clever there for a man with a piece to bring out."

"Yes, she's a clever girl that and improving every day. She's gone ahead, Fripley, since she first had the leading part in that farce of yours. Here, waiter, get me some more of this."

"She has indeed, and I'm awful glad of it, for she's a real good girl and a most conscientious actress. She works at her part and don't confine her attention merely

to her dress after the manner of a star or two we could name."

"No, there is a good many look to that a deuced deal more than the author's words," growled old Blatherwick (he was of the bar and a Q.C.) "It used not to be so in the old days."

"'The old days,' " laughed Fripley; "that simply means the time when our capacity for enjoyment was unlimited—when one could digest truffles cooked plain, and didn't know one had a liver."

"Do you mean to tell me, sir, that the actors of the present day can compare with the past?" replied Blatherwick, in Johnsonian tones.

"I mean that what we liked at twenty has lost its flavour at thirty; is flat, spiritless and insipid at forty; bitter as the Dead Sea fruit later on. *Voilà tout.*"

"It's all very well, B.," said Skeffington, addressing the barrister. "We

haven't seen him lately, but he is just as evasive in argument as of old. Till you have him in the witness-box, you'll never meet on fair terms."

"Libel, false and hideous!" cried Fripley.

"Think you're right, my boy; but of course Skef. meant the dock. Halloa! Shiners, you look as if that cigar didn't agree with you."

"'Spose I do—feel as if it didn't, at all events. Just went in there to light it," (and here the speaker, a young man about town, *nomine* Shillingham, jerked his head in the direction of the card-room,) "and dropped a quiet fifty."

"Who is 'on the part,' and who 'on the realize?'" inquired Fripley, which, in the shibboleth of the Thalamus, meant who is winning, and who losing?

"Well, Merrington is not doing well, and Jim Halden is playing with a most tremendous run of luck—picking up all the money, in fact."

“Does Fortie Merrington play here much?” inquired Fripley.

“Does Fortie Merrington play?” responded Shillingham. “Why, he does nothing else; he’s here as long as any one will set him a sovereign about anything, from cribbage to cutting the pack through. There’s he, Jim Halden, and one or two more are at it all night. You can’t have been about the place much lately, Furnival, or you’d know that.”

“I haven’t, I’ll go and take a look next door, I think,” and Fripley lounged into the adjoining card-room.

The keen anxious faces, that deep stillness so graphically described by Wendell Holmes under the generic name of “an audible quiet,” the cigar half-smoked and extinguished, but still retained mechanically between the lips, lithe nervous fingers playing restlessly with the gold pieces near them. Slightly quivering lips here and there, while occasionally

a parched mouth hurriedly drains the green tea or plain soda water that stands near it, are all unmistakable signs of deep and heavy play to any one who has passed his novitiate. Fortie's face is set hard and stern, he is losing, has been losing heavily; but as every one knows in good society, if you play, you must not disturb people about the loss of your patrimony. Mon Dieu, Monsieur, if you cannot take punishment why enter the arena? Fortie has not graduated quite long enough, not to show that he is losing; he saith not a word, but his face betrays that Fortune's tide is running against him. Halden's is a contrast to it. The Honourable Jim is a good loser, and few men take "a facer" with more studied serenity; but when, as to-night, he is winning, there is a feverish glitter in his eyes, and a low mocking laugh as he sweeps up the stakes that jars upon the ears of his less fortunate adversaries unpleasantly. As some one once said of him, "Jim is

very nice when he loses, but a more unpleasant brute when luck shines on him doesn't exist."

There are men so constituted, they bear their reverses with a smiling stoicism that extorts our admiration; but when their turn comes, the Mephistopheles side of their character is displayed, the taunt and jeer though unspoken are expressed in every gesture, and the losers writhe under the implication of their disability to hold their own with Fortune's favoured minion. Every inflection of voice seems to point out the absurdity of your contending against a player so much your superior. This very manner has been of incalculable service to Halden, in what may be termed his vocation, and driven many a man into backing his run of ill-luck recklessly. Whiffing the eternal cigarette, the fierce thirst for plunder gleaming in his eyes, the Honourable Jim still continues to sweep pool after pool to his side. The players gradually drop out,

the loo languishes, and at last Fortie, rising, declares he has had enough for the present, and rings the bell for some sherry and seltzer.

“What, Merrington, you a *beau joueur*, and yield before sunlight!” sneered Halden. “Faith! I’d have backed you at all events to play till the tide turned. I can only say thanks, gentlemen, for your want of courage. Such a run could not last much longer.”

“You’re right, Fortie,” said Furnival, as he laid his hand on Merrington’s shoulder. “Luck ’s dead against you to-night. Better wait for more auspicious times.”

“Jove, Fripley! I haven’t seen you for ages. Come and have some supper, let’s talk about old times at St. Helens, and let me forget this infernal night’s work for the present if I can.”

They adjourned to the supper-room, and were soon chatting pleasantly together over the old merry shooting days of last

autumn. But the demon of discord is ever busy in this world, and suddenly inspired Halden with hunger and thirst. It was not often he took supper. Success at play always produced a species of mild intoxication on his part, this he felt just at present could only be alleviated by grilled bones and champagne. There was little difficulty in finding three or four more men of the same way of thinking, and in less than twenty minutes the quiet *tête-à-tête* of Furnival and Fortie was broken in upon by this supper-seeking crew.

Quickly circulated the wine, boisterous grew the laughter, coarse libertine scandal supplied the place of wit, and many a woman's character experienced little mercy at the hands of that half inebriated set, who, to quote the old bitter sneer of Sheridan were "trusting to their memories for their jokes, and to their imaginations for their facts." Merrington and Furnival, though at the same table, were sitting a little apart.

“So the fair Jerningham has succumbed at last!” exclaimed a sallow dark man. “It is a disgrace to the whole of us the siege she has successfully sustained, like the Egyptian of old, she hardened her heart, like him, she has lived to repent. We ought to drink her conqueror’s health. Pledge me to Fortie Merrington and his *chère amie*.”

“What the devil do you mean?” interrupted Fortie, who just caught the speaker’s last words.

“Mean, *politesse*,” rejoined Halden. “We are going to drink the health of you and your divinity—the goddess at whose shrine so many of us have worshipped in vain, but who has satiated our thirst for revenge by yielding to your adoration.”

“Confound it! will you explain yourself?”

“Your bad luck seems to have thickened your brains,” sneered Halden. “We are about to drink the health of

yourself and your mistress, if I must speak plain."

"And who may she be?" inquired Fortie, in such fierce tones of resentment, as might have warned the whole party to be careful how they answered the question.

Whatever his faults, and they were as numerous as the sands of the sea, want of pluck was certainly not one of Jim Halden's weaknesses. In his usual clear languid tones, he dropped out "Lizzie Jerningham, and a handsome—"

But he never finished the sentence, for as he spoke, Fortie Merrington sprang to his feet.

"Liar!" he exclaimed vehemently, and at the same instant a cut glass tumbler whizzed through the air, shivered on Halden's forehead, and stretched that gentleman senseless on the carpet.

The members of the Thalamus were very far from straight-laced. It was a club indeed in which considerable license

was allowed ; the rules of the institution were principally regarded as obsolete, and only to be conformed to so far as agreeable to individual members. Acquaintanceship was not necessary before joining in conversation, and differing vehemently in argument with a man you met for the first time was rather characteristic of the Thalamus than not. But giving the lie and the projection of cut glass tumblers was going rather far even for the Thalamus. A second or so of dead silence, and then the whole party most thoroughly brought to their senses sprang to their feet. Most of them rushed to raise the fallen man. Furnival seized Fortie by the arm, and forcing him back into his chair, exclaimed—

“For God sake, Merrington, keep still !”

Fortie’s blue eyes lightened, and his brow was still knit, as he exclaimed savagely between his teeth. “He lied, and he knew it. He deserves all he has

got. I am not coward enough to sit still and hear a woman's character lied away at my expense."

"For heaven's sake be quiet, and come away now!" replied Furnival.

"All right, Fripley. I'll go down to the smoking-room. Come to me as soon as you've ascertained how he is," and Merrington, with one glance at his quondam friend now lying pale and senseless on the sofa, left the room. All the fierce De Driby blood was surging through his veins, and he little recked yet what the effects of his violence had been. His regard for the actress was pure as man's love for a sister. He looked upon her as the one good woman he now associated with, his indignation had been proportionate at hearing her name linked with his so vilely. He still writhed under the hideous slander that had been dealt to her. Dissipated and gambler though he might be, his love for Katie had kept open a pure spring in his heart. Enemy he might

be to himself, but Fortie was still keenly alive to the dictates of honour and truth. Caricatures of men there are, who would have felt vain of being deemed thus favoured by a handsome woman, and who would have simpered out the faint denial that admits the truth. But Fortie was made of no such ignoble stuff, and felt but little penitence that he had resented such gross imputation thus promptly and energetically.

But it is difficult to know how to act under such circumstances, the fact that a woman's name has occasioned a quarrel in a fast club, such as the Thalamus, is apt to taint her reputation. It is a scandalous world, my masters, and society is wont to believe the worst that can be said about everything and everybody. A woman's name is rarely bandied about without some reason, and in private life this perhaps holds good. But a woman who has to earn her bread from the hands of the public, is often exposed to scandal

and misrepresentation. When the advanced champions of woman's rights have progressed a little further in their mission, they will perhaps recognise this trifling obstacle, and admit civilization is as yet barely advanced far enough to give their scheme of "Hermaphroditism" fair play.

Some water dashed in his face—a little bathing of his temples—some brandy forced between his lips, and with a bad cut on the forehead, from which the blood still trickles, Jim Halden sits upon the sofa and stares around him. For a few seconds he looks hazily about him, then as full recollection of what has taken place comes back to his recovering senses, glares with evil eyes at his companions.

"You have all seen what took place," he muttered, hoarsely, at last. "You know it can't end here. Hamilton, will you be my friend on the occasion?"

“It’s a bad business, Jim;” returned the man addressed, (it was he who had proposed the toast) “if we said more than we had a right to do, Merrington most certainly used unjustifiable violence. I will act for you with pleasure, I couldn’t do otherwise, for I might just as well as yourself have been called to account as principal in the affair.”

“Good. Give me a tumbler of brandy-and-water, and then I’ll go home. Merrington throws hard, and I’m still a little hazy. It will be well for him perhaps if his aim is always as true,” and Halden tossed off the liquor and left the club.

“You heard what he said, Furnival. Whether you mean to act as Merrington’s friend or not I can’t say, but you can let him know at all events the mission I’m charged with.”

“I can’t tell you yet, Hamilton, as Fortie has said nothing to me on the subject, but I’ll give him the message.

Call on me to-morrow, and if it is not my vocation to talk the affair over with you, I will tell you who to go to. Good-night, it's an ugly business, and I promised to come back and let Merrington know how Halden was."

Fortie left with Furnival as soon as the latter rejoined him, and half-an-hour later the smoking-room was lost in conjectures concerning the upshot of the affair. Public sympathy was undoubtedly with Merrington, but that might principally be attributed to his being far the more popular man of the two. The quarrel rather mystified that virtuous congregation. A quarrel about an actress was quite *selon règle*, but to come to blows about an actress' reputation seemed Quixotism that was hard to understand, and only to be accounted for by the fact that Fortie was not only young but young in his generation.

It was about noon the next day when Hamilton presented himself at Fur-

nival's chambers, and requested to know whom he was to see on Merrington's behalf.

"Sit down, and let's talk the whole thing over;" replied Fripley. "Fortie leaves himself in my hands, and then like a hot-headed young fool, the first thing he does is to tie them."

"Well, my mission is simple; the most ample apology or fight. I don't see that Halden can do otherwise."

"But, my dear Hamilton, that sort of thing is almost gone out. It's very awkward; but is there no possible arrangement that suggests itself to you?"

"None. You are almost, though unknowingly, quoting Halden's words, 'I know, he said, men think the days of duelling are done, and fall back upon the barbarian code that physique is warrant for impertinence; but unfortunately, not having physical strength, I cling to the old ritual for the redress of insolence,

and have kept up my pistol shooting as well as my whist.’”

“Well, I own I can’t see my way out of it. My principal flatly refuses any apology, and I don’t see any basis for you and I to treat upon but that to begin with from one side, followed by retraction of the objectionable toast, &c., on yours. I thought duelling was a thing of the past, but I don’t see any help for it in this case.”

“Nor I,” rejoined Hamilton. “Halden is mad with rage, he can’t conceive that he gave the faintest excuse for such violence. You know his cynical temper. His last words to me were, ‘Apologize or fight, that’s my ultimatum. I hold myself guiltless; if he’s fool enough to fight for a woman’s character—*soit*. He might have torn all feminine London to shreds before I should have interfered.’”

“That settles it then, the only ques-

tion is when and where. What do you say?"

"Well, if you mean anything but balderdash of course it's impossible in this country. I certainly don't mean to form one of a quartette for public ridicule. If you can see any way to avert it, say so; but if they must fight let it be in earnest, and not a fiasco that shall make us all a laughing-stock for the next six weeks."

"Quite agree with you; would rather be shot myself than that."

"Very good; this is Tuesday; let us say Dieppe on Thursday morning. I shall cross to-night; will meet you at the Hotel Royal to-morrow, and arrange the actual when and where."

"Yes, that will do. I see no help for it, much as I dislike it."

"Nothing else to be done; and now I'll say good morning," and with that Mr. Hamilton took his departure.

Fripley sat musing over the whole

affair for nearly half-an-hour. Keenly alive to ridicule, yet thoroughly imbued with the theory that the days of duelling were numbered with the past, he quite entered into Hamilton's feeling on the subject, which might be aphoristically embodied as "Better bloodshed than derision." No, if they must act a tragedy, a tragedy let it be in all conscience. I fancy this would be the predominant feeling in any man who had undertaken the painful position of second to a duel, in these days of scepticism and ridicule. More evils have been expelled this world by laughter than by any other means. Persecution strengthens creeds, penal legislation promotes the vices it affects to banish, and a prohibitive tariff is a strong incentive to strong waters, &c. I conceive the State of Maine, teetotal by law, consumes stronger and more deleterious spirit than any other country, civilized or uncivilized. If you would extirpate vice or folly, let it once become the

subject of derision. Persecution, high penalties, and high prices, man defies ; but he succumbs with contemptible weakness to the laughter of his fellows.

CHAPTER IX.

A SHOOTING PARTY AT DIEPPE.

I WON'T say most people are, but no doubt many of the readers of this story are familiar with the quaint old seaport of Dieppe. We are a vagrant, restless, insular race, and to travel it behoves us that we must cross at least that turbulent, noisy, excitable Channel, which we designate as our own. One of those "who go down to the sea in ships," once likened it, as I came up it one splendid June night, to Regent Street. He dwelt with all a sailor's admiration on the numerous and magnificent light-houses that lined each shore, but I doubt if my landsman mind quite followed out the comparison, and assuredly many a

victim to the "*mal de mer*" who has escaped those oftentimes unpleasant waters, will utterly fail to comprehend the similitude. It can be as rough between Beachy Head and Dieppe for all practical purposes as is implied by a three days' gale in doubling the Cape, and having experienced both, I decide emphatically for the discomforts of the latter for choice. Still it don't make much difference, there is a certain point beyond which the feelings of the uninitiated in conjunction with the great centre of the ganglionic nerves utterly fails them. Sink or swim, death or the paroxysms become synonymous terms, and whether it is a heavy swell or a hurricane, a matter of supreme indifference.

"Danger! only wish to Heaven there was," cried one in his agony, and many of those who have suffered will endorse that shriek of despair.

It was a bright, clear, moonlight-night, but a south-wester was already running

up the gamut, as Furnival and Fortie, leaving the barrack-like hotel of New-haven, stepped on board the boat for Dieppe.

There were travellers commercial, travellers for health, travellers for pleasure, but except themselves, no travellers in pursuit of manslaughter. A strange thing to face an unpleasant journey for; and yet as Halden aptly said "Physical force is getting rather too much its own way in our present high state of civilization." The invention of gunpowder rather equalized men, and put five feet nothing on an equality with the Anaks of this world; but now, duelling is a luxury of nations, for which unborn generations will enjoy the privilege of paying. Solferinos and Sadowas, though glorious, are expensive, and we still seem far off the time (they don't apparently think so in England) when "Othello's occupation will be gone."

The usual attempt at the cigar which

rapidly lost its flavour, copious libations of brandy-and-water, the fevered hot doz-sleep in the saloon, and after an ordinary amount of tossing and tumbling, the twain struggled upon deck as, with a slight misty rain falling, the steamer ran alongside the quay at Dieppe.

“Let’s leave this fellow to look after our baggage through the custom-house, and make the best of our way to the Hotel Royal. A cup of hot coffee if we can get it, and then turn in for four or five hours. Wants a quarter to six,” said Fripley.

Furnival’s programme was carried out, and thanks to good sleep, and a capital breakfast they felt very different men, as they smoked their cigars under the piazza of the hotel about mid-day, from what they had been, when weeds of that identical brand had been consigned to the waves over-night as flavourless.

It was not long before Hamilton made his appearance ; he bowed to Fortie, who

returned his salutation curtly and left the table. He had not forgotten that Hamilton was as much implicated in this quarrel as his principal.

“Well, Furnival, of course the sooner this affair is over the better. Am afraid you had a nasty passage last night by the way : we did pretty well in the day boat.”

“Yes, it was roughish ; but what do you propose ?”

“The top of the cliffs, just above the castle, at seven to-morrow morning. I know this place well, and don’t think we can mend that.”

“Agreed ; you can just show me where we are to meet this afternoon. I’ll stroll out and smoke a cigar with you.”

“Well now, I’ve one more thing, I won’t say to settle, for I told Jim Halden I would do no more than submit it, and should decline to act any further for him if he made any point of it, and he yielded to that readily enough.”

“What is it?” inquired Furnival.

“Well, you know what a rum cynical fellow Halden is, and therefore it won’t surprise you more than it did me, and I’ll own that’s not a little. If you recollect, Merrington was a very heavy loser that night, and principally to Halden. Well, there’s some three hundred outstanding still, and Jim wants some kind of settlement before to-morrow. What he said was this, ‘say I expect that loo account settled before we meet. Merrington has no right to take advantage of the proof armour that his owing me that three hundred will afford him.’”

“Ah; look here, Hamilton, that’s just idle swagger. I know Jim Halden well; half his cynicism is perpetrated for effect, his greatest follies and iniquities are all consummated with a flavour of the foot-lights about them. I know him thoroughly or I should think he didn’t mean fighting, as he must know that signing a promissory note for the amount is all Fortie could

do towards settling here. But he does mean fighting, and this little piece of clap trap is meant for you and I to relate at the Thalamus and elsewhere on our return."

"You may be right," returned Hamilton, rather stiffly. Furnival's view of the case, though tolerably accurate, was not you see particularly complimentary to his (Hamilton's) penetration. "Halden left himself in my hands concerning it, and I don't intend to make a point of it."

"Very good. We'll send you over as satisfactory an acknowledgment as we can, all the same. You'll show me the where some time this afternoon, and that's I think all we've got to settle."

"Quite so. Good-bye for the present."

Furnival was quite correct in his estimate of Halden's character. That gentleman with every tendency to go to "the bad," that a perfectly unchecked taste for play and

luxury could foster, conjoined with a very moderate income on which to indulge it, had on more than one occasion out-Heroded Herod for the express purpose of enjoying the astonishment of his wild companions. It is not a very laudable ambition perhaps, but it is a very common one. He rather gloried in, if possible, shocking the by no means easily put-out-of-countenance set in which he lived. He gathered the unholiness of his ribald reputation around him, and clung the closer to it when he witnessed that it drew the eyes of men upon him. He had an innate faculty for vice, and he cultivated it as strenuously as good men do the paths of virtue, and with infinitely more success. As a depraved boy will at times use bad language, the meaning of which he barely comprehends, for the simple reason that it shocks, though they know not why, his less vicious school-fellows, so Halden would go through the quite unnecessary affectation of being

worse than he really was, to, if possible, appal his comrades. Weak miserable vanity—commonest and meanest of human frailties, the thirst for notoriety. Passion for which men have died, distinguished and made fools of themselves from Alcibiades and Nero to Byron and Shelley, leaving stains upon their names which require the exertions of no after generation to further blacken. A taste for theatricals is common enough in this world. Many men and women spend their lives in playing to the drawing-room audience of their social circle.

It is told in those moderately apocryphal writings, which we recognize under the name of English history, (as if any history dating back more than three centuries is the least reliable,) that the Saxons spent the night before the Battle of Hastings in revelry and feasting, the Normans in prayer and fasting. I can't say either of our belligerents spent their evening quite in that wise. Fortie

wrote two letters; one to Katie, and the other to Lizzie Jerningham—the first a more genuine love letter perhaps than he had written for some months, the near idea of immolation is apt to call out the affections wonderfully. Many men, aye, and many women have given vent to the passion-fraught cry of their souls, as they found themselves face to face with eternity; there seems no difficulty about owning the depths of our love when all may be so soon over.

“I preached as never sure to preach again,
And as a dying man to dying men,”

said Baxter, in allusion to one of his greatest efforts. Last words are ever read with reverence. If a man don't speak with his tongue, or his pen, from the heart then, he never will. All creeds condemn the being who would die with a lie upon his lips.

To Lizzie he wrote a short farewell,

with regrets at not having seen her to say good-bye, should he be destined never to meet her again; that he didn't name the cause of his quarrel, if I have made my readers understand Merrington's character, it is needless to add.

Jim Halden passed his evening in a modernized Saxon manner; ate an excellent dinner, and finished a bottle of some Beaune that had been fortunate enough to meet with his approval; muttered a simple execration upon the necessity of early rising, and then sought his godless, graceless, dreamless pillow. Yes, I am afraid it is often so; the reprobate sleeps "the sleep of the just," while poor struggling humanity, that is conscious of weakness and wrong-doing, tosses in the bed-clothes. You may say what you like about remorse, but I verily believe that oblivion comes to the hardened sinner. The moral faculties shrivel up from constant contact with the fierce furnace of vicious passions.

A fine, clear morning; the sun shines pleasantly over *La Plage*, as yet in the possession of a few *douaniers* and fishermen, gilds the glass and metal roof of the *Etablissement*, shimmers against the white chalky cliffs, glitters over the fresh, lazy, sparkling water, and throws an aureole round the image of Our Lady at the pier foot. A soft, westerly wind just ripples the sea, which seems to smile lovingly on the shore, like a shrewish coquette in her moment of weakness. Pick the year round, and there could not have been selected a pleasanter morning for homicide.

Leisurely Fortie and Furnival ascend the steep winding hill that leads up through the Castle. Not much conversation goes on between them, for Fripley loves Fortie as a brother, and is too anxious about the result to say much. The latter prefers his own thoughts. He has told Furnival what he wishes in case of the worst, and don't feel like talk now.

I opine, as a rule, men do not under such circumstances.

As they cross the little drawbridge leading on to the open cliff, a corporal of Zouaves surveys them inquisitively. The small mahogany box under Fripley's arm seems to irradiate his intelligence.

"Ah!" he exclaims with a wink, and placing his forefinger for an instant against his nose, "Poof c-c-crac. *Bien, mes amis, vous faites un petit jeu de guerre — poof c-c-crac — l'honneur sauvé et un beau retour. Cela m'est arrivé aussi. Bon fortune, mes braves. Je vous salue.*"

Halden and his friend are lounging on the grassy plateau looking over the sea, they are some few minutes before their antagonists, and Jim's lips as usual are decorated with a cigarette. This is not quite all dramatic effect for Halden is a ceaseless smoker, natheless he has quite made up his mind to light a fresh one for

that purpose before taking up his ground. He is perfectly alive to all the theatrical requirements of the position, and without feeling any particular apprehension on the subject, intends if shot to fall as a decent tableau. Halden's indeed, though he has numbered but five-and-twenty years, is such a bored broken existence, that he does not feel so much of that natural clinging to life that is wont to influence men, not only of his years, but of far more mature age. He is as perfect a pagan as ever existed in ancient Rome—not in the slightest degree from conviction, but simply like many men of his stamp, that he has never thought at all upon the subject.

“I do hope,” muttered Hamilton at last, “that this affair will terminate without any serious grief to either you or Merrington.”

“Yes, it would perhaps be best so. I've cooled down now, or else I felt pretty tigerish at first. D'ye mean shall I fire

in the air?" he suddenly inquired, sharply. "No; I never play for sugarplums. I shall hit Merrington to prevent his shooting me. I've no fancy for being a high-minded target."

At this juncture, Fripley and Merrington were seen approaching, and Hamilton walked forward to meet them.

"Nothing to be done," he observed to Furnival, after saluting them, "but to put them up."

"Nothing; we'll load the pistols, and then you had better step the ground."

This was done, the legitimate fifteen paces soon measured, and then as the glorious sun gilded the old castle and shone brightly out over the rippling waters, Merrington and Halden stood face to face.

"Hamilton will give you the word, gentlemen. He will count one—two—three, at the three you fire, and remember I hold him guilty of murder who fires before that word is spoken," and then

Fripley fell back and awaited the result with feverish anxiety.

There they stood, those two almost boyish figures. A clear sparkling joyous morning on which to resign this fair world for eternity.

“One—two—three,” drop in measured tones from Hamilton’s lips.

Crack, go the pistols, as near simultaneously as may be. Halden stands erect and motionless. Fortie gives a start, half turns and recedes a pace or so. A hot iron seems to have penetrated his arm.

“Are you hit?” cries Furnival, as he rushes up.

“Yes, a trifle; it’s a mere nothing. I can go on,” but his right arm dangles helpless, the bone fractured by Halden’s bullet.

“His right arm’s broke,” cried Fripley. “Hamilton, I’m sure you’ll agree with me, this has gone far enough. Anyway, it is quite impossible it should proceed further.”

“Quite;” returned the other. “Stay with him, and I’ll hurry into town with Halden, and we’ll send you a surgeon up here the first thing,” and Hamilton carried his principal off the ground.

Fortie felt a little sick for a few minutes and sat down on the grass, a gulp of brandy, however, from Furnival’s flask soon recovered him.

“I tell you what,” said the latter, “we had better make a sling of our handkerchiefs for the arm, and then I daresay you’ll be able to walk back to the hotel, it’s not far, you know.”

“Yes; patch the arm up somehow, and I shall do well enough;” and as soon as the sling was constructed the pair proceeded homewards.

“*L’honneur est sauvé*,” as the French corporal remarked, and poor Fortie goes to bed, to linger out the tedium of recovery that that broken limb involves—the cost of righting an innocent woman’s fair fame—whilst Halden, *premier vilain*

de cette petite tragédie whirls rapidly off to Paris without much thought concerning the effects of his unrighteous bullet, though to do him justice, he waited to hear that no serious consequences were apprehended.

It is often so ; the maligners and marauders of this world pass scatheless, while the honest and true bear the brunt of the tempest. Providence, for a time, seems to favour the evil-doers. But these last, in the end, rarely fail to kindle the fires of the Nemesis that awaits them. As the unburnt frolic round the fire, so the Haldens of this earth invariably prosecute their destiny to the finish, undeterred by the hairbreadth escapes and fine shaving that should have acted as warnings.

Dull and monotonous indeed were those weary weeks of convalescence ; for after the first few days Fripley's avocations compelled him to return to London. Fortie had lots of time to meditate upon

the fiasco he had made of his start in life. Money and opportunity wasted, and for what? Had he even enjoyed the wild feverish existence he had been leading of late. No ; he honestly owned to himself that he had not. Many have done the same under similar circumstances, and vowed, as he did, amendment for the future. The old story, you will say, of "when the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be;" something in that perhaps, but the righteous clean-living people of this world don't recognise how hard it is for these poor sinners to break their chains. Bear in mind De Quincy's description of the agonies attendant on the abstaining from opium. Unlimited loo, baccarât *et omne hoc genus* is but another form of such fatal stimulant.

Bone and sinew of character are required to shake off the thrall, and Fortie's character was still but gristle. Away from temptation, and put in the way of honestly earning his bread, he might now

rise in the world. There is much gold mixed with all this dross, and he has the safeguard of an honest love to keep him in the straight path. But anon comes that unanswerable question to so many of his kind, "What am I to do?" and then Fortie in his moments of depression and weakness leans his head upon his hand, and recognises his own littleness and helplessness.

Fortie gets better by degrees, and before long is lounging about with his arm in a sling. It has been a more tedious business though than it should have been, consequent on a good deal of fever in the first instance, the result probably of the reckless life he had been leading during these past months. He worries, too, a great deal about not being able to write to Katie. His right arm you see is useless, and substituting the left hand for purposes of calligraphy by no means rapidly arrived at. Many of the visitors at the hotel are disposed

to be civil to the pale, good-looking, listless Englishman with his arm in a sling, and he at last got one of these to write a few lines explaining his silence, by a fictitious account of breaking the limb in a carriage. Unfortunately, as will be hereafter seen, he got a lady to write these half dozen lines for him. She was a bright lively girl, who happened to sit next to him at the table-d'hôte, travelling with her father, mother, and a couple of sisters. Fortie made their acquaintance in the usual manner of such occasions. They all liked him, and were kind to him, he looked so ill and seemed so melancholy, two facts connected with a good-looking man quite enough to interest any young ladies. The one who sat next him, often rendered the little assistances at dinner that his disabled state required, and so at last he asked her to write these few simple lines for him.

These people will never cross the thread

of my story again. It was necessary to mention this trivial incident, as from the way in which Katie eventually translated it, after wild passionate illogical fashion, a very pretty fire of misery and distrust was kindled between her and her lover.

“What great events from trivial causes spring!”

is so wonderfully true in the history of most human beings if you go back to “first causes,” that I often wonder if we ever dare light a cigar without due reflection. Luckily the problem solves itself, man must smoke, and will be no wiser by any amount of cogitation thereon beforehand.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF THE DUEL.

IT is curious with what marvellous celerity the *bêtises* of our lives are communicated to our friends and relatives. Pray don't flatter yourself that there is even a second cousin who is in ignorance of your folly in backing that bill of Smithson's, of the arrest that followed so duly at the expiration of the ninety and odd days, or of the fortnight you passed in the sponging-house before you could get that little matter arranged. I don't think the women fare much better. Pardon, mademoiselle, but everyone on the list of your acquaintance is talking of the precious mess you have made of it; how engaged to Collinson the great wine-mer-

chant, you would flirt so desperately with young Stratton of the Lancers; and how, like the finale of poor Ariadne, Theseus and Bacchus have both left you to wear the willow. No, the record of our faults and follies seems disseminated by telegraph. The story of our good deeds by walking-post. And they are so few and far between, it is so seldom we distinguish ourselves in this world, either morally, physically, or intellectually, that I do not know that a man can do a wiser thing than sit down and write circulars to his friends and relations on those sparse occasions. Everything to your disadvantage, you may implicitly rely upon their being acquainted with, and it is well if they know no more than the truth upon that point; but how you saved that man's life in the Bay of Bengal at the risk of your own, how you got the V.C. for your conduct at the storming of the Kaiserbagh, that you were the writer of the comedy all London crowded to see last season, or

that your's was the best maiden speech St. Stephen's has heard these last ten years—oh, my brethren, proclaim it yourself in the highways and byeways, and on the house-tops.

Bear in mind what Mr. Helps has so pertinently said upon this subject, "Suppose you have a force which may be represented by the number one hundred, seventy-three parts at least of that force should be given to the trumpet; the remaining twenty-seven parts may not be disadvantageously spent in doing the thing which is to be trumpeted."

The story of the duel was of course as freely circulated through the Thalamus, as the story of the quarrel had been previously. From that club it permeated to many other regions. If Fortie was as yet but very partially known in the London world, Furnival and Jim Halden were rather men of mark in the very fast sets they mixed in. It may be easily imagined, therefore, that most of the clubs

in the vicinity of St. James' had a version, more or less incorrect, of the whole affair.

Knowing the pains that Horace De Driby is at to be cognisant of his cousin's doings, that besides "the social spider," so much given to digital ablution in that street off the Strand, he has several correspondents, men about town all pledged to let him know how young Merrington is getting on, and it is a sheer matter of course that ere many days are over Horace is in possession of this story also. He writes to more than one for further particulars, and at last arrives at a very fair approximation of the true state of the case. On one point only is he left, not so much in the dark, but in a state of misconception—namely, Fortie's relations with Lizzie Jerningham.

The scandalous club world of London are not particularly reticent in their criticisms of any lady who may give occasion

to be what is termed "talked about," even when her brows are encircled by a coronet; but when the lady happens to be on the stage, as may be supposed they give free rein to their tongues, and it may be doubted whether Fortie would not have done better as regards the actress's fair fame, if he had defended it with less vigour and more discretion. But you can't expect much wisdom at two-and-twenty, when you so often see three score and ten still showing what follies humanity can be capable of.

Horace pondered a good deal upon what use he might make of this historiette. He had pretty well made up his mind that it should be duly recounted to Sir Giles; but how that cynical old sybarite would take it was a fact that perplexed him sorely. That the Baronet, though he had burst forth into a flame of indignation at the idea of Fortie's marrying his agent's daughter, might chuckle with grim satisfaction over the idea of

his nephew's fighting a duel in consequence of his intrigue with an actress, was a possibility that he could but deem as highly probable. From what he knew of his uncle's character, that irritable old Pagan was more likely to be rather tickled than otherwise with the escapade of his graceless nephew.

He knew very well that Sir Giles, without any disposition to yield regarding Fortie's engagement, still felt bitterly in his inmost heart, as far as he possessed such a thing, their estrangement. The old man, whose affections had been for many years so dead to his kind, had a great yearning for the bright-eyed youngster who recalled his gay brother-in-law and favourite sister so vividly to his memory. It was such years since he had had any one to love; even in the most cynical disposition that craving for love from some fellow-creature is rarely extinct. Fortie's free, off-hand, careless manner had made its way with him, and the utter

absence of all fear of his uncle that characterized their intercourse, had a charm for the Baronet, too long accustomed to find himself regarded with considerable awe by those who surrounded him. All this Horace was quite aware of.

He had therefore laid it down as an axiom in the game he was now playing, that a meeting between the two was a thing he must carefully guard against. The pride of Sir Giles he felt pretty positive would, at all events, preclude any overtures from his side for a reconciliation; but, he argued, nothing is more likely than that a man in love should come down to visit his mistress. It was highly probable that Fortie might run down to see Kate Moseley, and that then he and Sir Giles might meet accidentally. That chance must be provided against, and this story seemed to give him the means he wanted for producing an estrangement between the lovers.

Horace De Driby, it must be premised, was a man who knew but little of women. Shrewd and astute as he was, he was peculiarly unqualified to follow the windings of a woman's mind. Cool, calm, and logical himself, ever with a defined end or purpose in view, he argued that Kate Moseley had engaged herself to Fortie with the well regulated design of improving her position. From Katie's own confession, we know that so far there was a spice of truth in his deduction in the outset. Acting upon this idea, he had taken steps that she should be duly advised of Fortie's reckless career, and of how very little chance there was of a reconciliation between him and his uncle. Katie shed many a tear and wrote many a warm passionate letter of remonstrance, still she was not to be swayed from her allegiance by such rumours as these.

But Horace was a patient student. He had perhaps dwelt a little unduly on

that story Tallemont des Reaux relates of a distinguished lady in the days of Louis XIII of France, who foiled in her attempts to marry an elderly widower, eventually married the eldest son of the Duc de Villars, although he was a hunch-backed depraved imbecile, and all to attain the privilege of being seated in the presence of royalty. Verily, women work hard at times for position in this world. He had not arrived at the conclusion that women are far oftener swayed by pride, pique, love, impulse or vanity than reason; but it had suddenly occurred to him that wondrous changes had been wrought in woman's breast through the passion of jealousy, and the seed was in his hand ripe for the sowing.

Thackeray has said, I think, in "Pendennis," something to the effect that "There are stories to a man's disadvantage which the women who love him best are ever pronest to believe." Who

is there of us that fails to recognise the truth of that dogma? And it is precisely one of such stories that Horace now meditates the narration of.

To do him justice, he thoroughly takes the club views of Fortie's relations with the actress, and though, as I have already said, not likely to be over scrupulous in the prosecution of the design to which with an almost monomaniacal energy he has devoted himself, yet he is convinced in the main of the truth of the story he means Katie should hear.

The question he now debates with himself is how? Of course he will bear the story to Sir Giles; but it need scarcely be said, that since the results of proclaiming her engagement had been made manifest, Katie has never sought the old library, never set foot in the Manor House, never encountered Sir Giles. Indeed she keeps most diligently out of his way, so that it is not likely to reach her through that channel. The Reverend

Phillip Filander has hitherto been the means by which Horace has contrived to convey the history of Fortie's delinquencies to her ears. But the little man, though now quite aware that entertaining a passion for Miss Moseley is hopeless, and having even established a violent flirtation with Mrs. Briarly, is still loyal to Kate. Horace knows that though Filander has carried on these reports he has toned them down, spoken of them to the girl as a thing she had better hear from him than through chance rumour; but as probably an exaggeration of the truth. He will hardly carry such a story as this to her. Yet he must—ah, he has it now—he will tell him to break to her that Fortie has been engaged in a duel and is badly wounded; nothing more at present. It is but then dropping a word or two here and there about the village. Katie's anxiety and thirst for intelligence will cause her either to inquire, or have inquiry made for her, little doubt but

she gets a highly coloured version of the affair before long.

In the meantime he had better go up and tell the story to Sir Giles. First, calling at his curate's lodgings to give him his *rôle*, which he did as heretofore with, "You had better break this to her, Filander, she ought not to be left to learn it by chance, poor girl." Horace made the best of his way to the Manor House, and was shewn into Sir Giles's sanctum.

"Good morning, Horace;" said the Baronet. "Which are you, a man of wants or a man of news, this morning? Gad! I hear nothing of what goes on in the world but what you tell me, now-a-days."

"I have come to tell you bad news about my cousin Fortie, uncle."

"Excuse me, that is a subject upon which I am indifferent. I really am not justified in inquiring into Mr.—ah, Mr. Merrington's affairs. I certainly should

not expect to hear anything further concerning him, than that he had gone to the devil."

"Fortie, uncle, has stood but a few days back on the brink of eternity. Even now he is wounded at Dieppe, the consequences of a duel with a Mr. Halden."

"Wounded! Fortie wounded! not dangerously?" inquired the Baronet, eagerly.

"No. I have not heard the extent of the injury, but I hear he is in no danger," answered Horace; but the anxiety that his uncle had unwittingly betrayed, made him still more alive as to how detrimental to his views a meeting between Sir Giles and Fortie might become.

"Yes, sir;" said the Baronet, recovering himself. "One of the faults of the levelling age we live in; the *jeunesse dorée* of this generation neglect their pistol shooting. In my day, to shoot straight

with that weapon was part of a gentleman's education. It inculcated politeness at all events; an art which seems destined shortly to be extinct. And pray what induced Fortie to be thus far true to his hereditary instincts? Nothing disreputable on his side?" inquired Sir Giles, sharply.

"Some quarrel I hear about an actress, whom the world suppose to enjoy the benefit of Fortie's protection. A position for her which it seems that he declines to admit, and called this man Halden out for asserting."

"Ha! then I suppose he has forgotten all about the little Moseley girl down here. Gad! I thought he would soon come to his senses. But what does the London world say on the subject? Which side do they espouse?" and the Baronet eyed his nephew keenly.

"This Mr. Halden's, I fancy. Fortie it seems used unnecessary violence when the altercation took place. Halden is a

small man, and sympathy is apt to be with the weakest. However, it's a tolerable scandal all over town just now."

Of course! enunciated with too much noise. Be as wicked as you will, but never set public opinion at defiance. The world is quite ready to gloss over the most heinous offences, if you break them to it gently like a death in the family.

It was rarely Horace obtruded his cloth, never to his uncle. It was necessary for his interests that they should remain upon as good terms as he could compass. Rebuke or expostulation on his part would have at once dissolved all ties between them. And it must further be borne always in mind, in extenuation of Horace De Driby, that his profession was none of his choice, that he pleaded his want of vocation for it, and that his uncle had bid him take the family living or expect no help from him. Horace never could have been a good clergyman, but he might

have been a fair, honest, tolerably conscientious parish priest had it not been for his mother's injudicious training. She had brought him up to look upon St. Helens as his heritage, it was the turning point of his career; the talent, energy and obstinacy innate in the man were now all devoted to that one object. There were times when he half despised himself, but he never faltered in his schemes, prosecuting them in fact with all the relentless vehemence of his determined nature. He hesitated for some time, and then observed.

"I think you are wrong in one deduction. I don't believe that Fortie has either broken with, or forgotten Kate Moseley."

"Perhaps not broken," sneered the Baronet, "but I should imagine has clean forgotten her; the former, I presume, he leaves her to do. Pooh, Horace! when a man fights about an actress in London, a little country girl like

the Moseley cannot be much in his thoughts."

"You should know best, but I adhere to my own opinion; however, I must be off," and Horace wished the Baronet good morning.

The Reverend Phillip Filander meanwhile, with sore misgivings and much nervous tribulation, is making his way down to Birkett Moseley's house by the river. Spite of his little weaknesses with regard to the fair sex, he is a good-hearted honest little man, so transparent too in this one foible—a foible so common amongst men of that shy nervous type. Little as one would believe it, the vanity of this class of men is often enormous, and their very shyness proceeds from this cold callous world appraising them so much below their own valuation. With regard to Katie, he is quite aware now that she is not fair for him at all events, and since his mind grasped that fact they have been fast friends. Katie,

indeed, is his confidante and adviser concerning his amour with Mrs. Briarly (the widow of the croquet party,) and he is a constant visitor there. Giving pain to anything is so antithetical to his nature, that his influence in the parish generally and in the Sunday school in particular may be fairly denominated feeble. In short, the parishioners regard him rather as a buffer, with which to break and mitigate the well-deserved storm that sometimes breaks upon them from the lips of their stern rector.

Mr. Filander, as he wends his way on his errand, is conscious of undefined feelings in his throat, and a more unconquerable inclination than usual to stammer. He even sits down by the river side and essays a Gregorian chant of which he always makes a mess, with a view to the alleviation of this infirmity. As every one knows, people who stammer frightfully in conversation, are quite free from such impediment when singing. But

that proves unsatisfactory; a verse of the morning hymn does better, and with some slight mitigation of discomfort the Curate continues his road.

Katie welcomes him cordially. Shut up in herself and her love, she has but a monotonous existence of it now. The announcement of her engagement struck her off the visiting roll of the Manor House. Was it not matter of course that some of the neighbourhood, with whom she was just beginning to get acquainted should follow so illustrious an example. Sycophancy is pretty rife in this world, but to see it in its native integrity commend me to a country neighbourhood.

Debarred from the society she had been educated for. Too proud and too refined to tolerate that of the class to which she virtually belonged, Katie had nothing left for it but to live her lonely life as she best might. She had but her love and her father to fall back upon. Rough as he was, Katie dearly loved him;

and, as we know, all the strong vehemence of his nature was concentrated in love for his daughter. So they two lived a quiet monotonous existence together, the girl sometimes wrapped in the rose leaves of her passion, anon fretting her heart out at the rumours of Fortie's misdoings. She was more sad than usual this morning. Her lover was not a good correspondent, still it was not often he left her so long without a scrap of some kind.

"Very good of you, Mr. Filander, to come and see me," said Katie, as she dropped into an arm-chair after the usual greetings.

"You're v-v-very kind, I'm sure, Miss Moseley," replied the Curate, feeling even more hot and uncomfortable than was his wont on such occasions.

"Have you seen the Stephensons lately? They and you are the only people who vouchsafe to notice me now-a-days."

“No, n-n-no ; I have seen nobody the last week but Mrs. Briarly.”

“Ah, Mr. Filander ! You have surrendered at last, you see. It will be a nice thing for you both, she wants somebody to take care of her now. When am I to make my congratulations ?”

“Really now, Miss Moseley, you shouldn’t c-c-chaff me about it. I want your a-advice so much. Do you think I, that is, mean I—I—I have a chance ?”

“Yes, of course I do,” said Katie, smiling. “Ask her and see. She’ll say yes, I’ll lay my hand on it.”

“Well, sometimes I t-t-think she would ; but when it comes to the point, my heart mis-m-misgives me ;” and the Curate blushed fearfully.

“Ah ! Mr. Filander, ‘Faint heart never won fair lady.’ No such mistake as being afraid of us. Take my advice, and have confidence.”

“Thanks—thanks ; but oh ! I’ve some-

thing—some—something to tell you, and I'm afraid to b-b-begin."

"What is it?" inquired Kate.

"It's—it's bad news."

"Not about Fort—Mr. Merrington?" said the girl, quickly.

"Yes. Oh, dear! how shall I tell y-you?"

"Speak! quick—let me know it at once," said Katie, rising.

"He—he—he's hurt; he fought a d-d-duel," stammered the Curate, struggling furiously with his infirmity.

"Hurt—a—duel—hurt badly? Quick, what is it?"

"N-n-not badly!" gasped the Curate, as Katie began pacing the room in her excitement. "He is wounded, but—b-b-but not seriously."

"Thank Heaven! I have not heard so long," muttered the girl, unconsciously, "and this is the reason. Where is he? Who told you?" she continued, with startling abruptness.

To say that Mr. Filander wished himself at the Antipodes as Kate, with flashing eyes, put her curt passionate queries, would be but a mild definition of his helplessness and demoralization. Instinctively he stammered out that he didn't know; then, as he met the eager face looking down at his, he faltered forth "Dieppe," and "Horace De Driby."

"You are sure he is not dangerously wounded?" inquired Kate.

"Q-q-quite. Mr. De Driby said decidedly there was nothing serious."

"Did he tell you the cause?"

"No—n-n-no; I only know what I have told you, Miss Moseley."

"You will excuse me, I know. The relation in which I stand to Mr. Mer-rington is no secret in the neighbourhood. You can scarcely be surprised that I feel unhinged by this."

"I'm sure I wish—I wouldn't—I m-mean I hadn't told you."

"No," said Kate, with a mournful

smile, as she held out her hand to him. "It was kind of you to come and tell me, sad news as it is. I am sure you meant it kindly."

"Indeed, indeed, I d-d-did," stammered the unhappy Curate; and the honest little man took his departure, more sincerely uncomfortable at the sight of the tears that stood in Katie's eyes as she shook hands with him, than he had felt for many a long day.

"Wounded and at Dieppe!" mused the girl, as the tears trickled slowly down her cheeks. "Fortie! Fortie! my darling, what mad folly have you been guilty of now? Can I go to him? If I can, I must. I don't care what people say, my place should be at his bedside now. If scandal should be busy with my name, he must right me. Who should nurse him but his betrothed? Father must come over too, and then there can be no harm."

Then she wondered what he had fought

about, and her quick, imaginative mind painted him as a wounded hero. Woman, where she loves, is apt to be idolatrous. She often wakes—too often—to the recognition of what a wooden idol she has set up and worshipped; but when the champions of “women’s rights” have carried their point, it is gratifying to think there will be an end to all this description of Fetishism, and some talented woman—I mean female—will illumine us with a new “Utopia.”

Impatiently did Katie wait for her father’s return, and as she waited, she still mused. She knew enough of the world to know that duels were not common now-a-days. What could Fortie have fought about? began to be a prominent idea in her mind. Still picturing her lover as a hero, an unpleasant impression began to steal over her that a duel now-a-days is apt to be connected with an ugly story. She gets more nervous as she sits there alone, looking

over the river; predominant idea still that she must go to Fortie at Dieppe.

At last she hears her father's step, and rises to meet him. Birkett Moseley comes steadily into the room.

"Aye, lass!" he cries, "you're main late with tea to-night, I'm thinking."

Katie walks rapidly towards him, and places her clasped hands on his shoulder. "Father," she said, "I am in sore trouble. Fortie Merrington has fought a duel, and lies badly wounded at Dieppe."

"Mr. Fortie fought a duel and got hurten, that's a bad job. Where did ye say he was, girl?"

"At Dieppe, a town on the French coast; and, father, I must go to him at once."

"Who told you, and did you hear whether he was main badly hurted or not?"

"Mr. Filander told me, and he said it was not serious."

“Thank God !” replied Moseley, “I’d be loathe any harm happened to the lad for his own sake, let alone yours.”

“And we shall start to-morrow to see him, shan’t we, father? My place should be by his bedside now.”

“No,” replied Birkett Moseley, “I think not, while Mrs. De Driby is alive and with full use of her tongue. My word, child, she’d tear the last scrap of character from off ye, the old she-devil. She’s said enough about ye already. Besides it’s clean impossible, I could na leave home till after harvest. Be brave, Katie,” he continued, as he looked down upon the girl’s mournful countenance, “Mr. Fortie’s not much hurt, though we can’t go to him I dare say he’ll not be long before he lets us see him.”

“I suppose you are right, father, though I wish it could be otherwise,” replied Katie, slowly. She had not thought of Mrs. De Driby and Co. when she first meditated flying to the side of

her lover's sick bed, though that exemplary lady had exerted herself a good deal since the knowledge of the engagement had first come to her ears.

“I'm sure I am, darling,” replied her father, “I love you and him; if he was in serious danger, Katie, we would start, and you should see him, come what might. But as it is, we must bide quiet and not give the tongues of the countryside such a chance as that would be.”

CHAPTER XI.

“O BEWARE, MY LORD, OF JEALOUSY.”

AS may be easily supposed, Mrs. De Driby had had a good deal to say when the story of her nephew's delinquency leaked out. She drove about the country, and with upraised eyes and a little shriek of derision told her story, how “That chit of a Moseley girl, having entangled my foolish nephew with her French graces, has actually the presumption to think he'll marry her;” and then Mrs. De Driby dwelt upon the horrible inroads democracy was making upon our homes and our altars. “That's not quite what I mean, my dear; but of course all thinking people must see that the

hideous atrocities of the French revolution are about to recur in our native land."

At which period, Mrs. De Driby generally put her handkerchief to her eyes with an affected shudder at the bare thought of the hideous cry of "*à bas les aristocrats, à la lanterne,*" or whatever might be the English equivalent that presented itself to her perturbed mind.

It was thanks in great measure to her exertions, that the neighbourhood, rather disposed to take up Kate, had so rapidly dropped her again.

It was not long before Birkett Moseley heard the story of Fortie's duel; it was the current rumour round the country "how Mr. Fortie had fought a duel for the smiles of an actress, and had been badly wounded therein." People shook their heads, and said he was just as wild a slip as ever his father had been, wondered what Miss Moseley thought of it all. She might have guessed, if she had

common sense, that a wild young springal like that was only amusing himself with her. Blamed her more than him, (Mrs. De Driby's theory in full blast now) what business had she to set her cap at the young squire, and occasion this quarrel between him and his uncle, for of course that was no secret in the neighbourhood. Very little to your disadvantage ever is, closely as you may think you have concealed it. So after a few days' talk it was decided that Fortie Merrington was a scape-grace reprobate, and Kate a designing young woman, who had reaped the just reward of her exceeding artfulness.

It was sadly Birkett Moseley made his way home, after making himself acquainted with this story in all its bearings, as understood in Lincolnshire. Sad news this, to take to his darling, and it was with a heavy heart he entered his home the second day after Mr. Filander's visit.

“Well father, have you heard anything?” inquired Katie anxiously.

“Yes, girl! enough to make me wish that you and Fortie Merrington had never met, I wish he had never darkened this doorstep.”

“Tell me, father, what you mean in pity sake!” and Katie knelt beside the chair, into which Moseley had thrown himself.

“I’ve heard enough to make me know he’s unworthy of you. Enough to make me know he’s clean forgot you, Katie.”

“No! I’ll not believe that, he’s done something foolish, madly foolish; but he’s not forgot *me*, father,” and the girl’s quiet resolved tones for a moment staggered Moseley.

“He has, child. What will you say when I tell you he risked his life for love of another woman.”

The blood faded out of Katie’s cheeks, but she was still loyal in her love.

“Say!” she exclaimed, rising proudly to her feet, “say that I don’t believe it. When I cease to believe in Fortie’s truth God help me, for I shall need it sorely.”

“My child,” replied her father, “is it likely I would come to you with this story if I did not thoroughly believe it? It’s a bad business,” he continued, relapsing into the country dialect, which he habitually used, though deep emotion had for a moment lifted him out of it. “The gentlefolks thinks they may play wie a girl’s feelings. Young chaps like he mean nothing, and only laugh when girls of your station are fools enough to believe ’em.”

“It is hard, it is hard!” replied Katie, “when you, father, speak to me in this wise; but I’ll have faith in Fortie yet, at least—till—till I hear from him,” and here, I am afraid, Katie though she tried hard, and made a great gulp to restrain her tears, rather broke down.

But day after day passed away, and brought no letter to Katie, neither was there any change in the story of the duel. She had seen Mr. Filander again and questioned him closely on the subject, thereby occasioning him some twenty minutes of most excruciating torture, but his account tallied precisely with her father's. The seeds of jealousy began to germinate, it wanted but an artificial shower to bring them well above ground, once there we all know what rapid progress they make.

Meanwhile poor Katie went about sadly—a feverish excitement possessed her—she had written letter upon letter to Fortie and received no reply. She ceased to go about the village; she thought, poor little soul, that they looked upon her with pity, and her pride could not brook that. She fretted much, poor child—a mild preparation for what she was destined to undergo if she did but know it. But it came at last; a letter in a strange

hand, and yet which purported to be from Fortie Merrington.

“Dear Katie,” it ran :—“Ten thousand pardons for not writing to you sooner, but I have been unable to do so, indeed am still, and you are indebted to a kind-hearted amanuensis for even these few lines. I had a bad accident some three weeks back. We were overturned in a carriage, and I, unfortunately, broke my right arm. It is going on well; but of course the cure is tedious, and in the meantime I cannot use it at all. You must accept this as a reason for my silence both past and to come. Good-bye; ever dear Katie.

“Yours,

“FORTIE MERRINGTON.”

And this was what she had been fretting her heart out for—a lie in strange handwriting. These few cold lines in lieu of the warm passionate letters of a

few weeks back, and those evidently traced by a woman's hand. No tears fell from her eyes now. I have said the seeds of jealousy had been sown—they grew apace. What! he couldn't trust her with the truth, a thing patent to all the world; but must send her that miserable subterfuge, that transparent lie! He must know that his conduct was past justification when he could write thus to her. Ah, who did write? it was a woman's hand. Yes, that other woman's doubtless. She was by his side tending him through all the tediousness of his convalescence, and laughing as she penned these few lines of fiction to the credulous country girl.

“Trifles, light as air,
Are to the jealous, confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ.”

Once the madness had seized upon her brain, her imagination fed on the idea apace. She got out all his letters. Yes,

could there be a doubt, they had been gradually growing colder and curter of late. Her jealous eyes even reckoned up the terms of endearment in his last notes, to compare them with the former. The frenzy raged through her veins. Fool! weak miserable fool that she had been to believe in a man's truth! Forty-eight hours ago and you could not have induced her to believe that Merrington might be false to her. Now it would have been a difficulty to induce her to put faith in his honesty or honour. She had been hardly tried, mind, for days; she had been wound up to a great pitch of feverish excitement, her sole support under this tension being her unswerving loyalty to her lover. Now that article of faith was wrenched from her. Clever little head though it might be, what wonder that it never stopped to sift evidence, or to hear further. Her revulsion of feeling was in proportion to her previous unhesitating reliance on her lover's truth. She knew that note written in a

strange hand was all a falsehood. Once to doubt, after all the stories she had heard was fatal, and with burning tearless eyes she sat in her own room now thinking what she should do.

There was a light scratching at the chamber door; but lost in her own thoughts, Katie never heard it, the door was insecurely fastened and gently gave way under the mute appeal of Bess's paws. Since the disappearance of her master she had attached herself to Katie, and the girl had made a great pet of that evil-looking retriever. Bess peeped in wistfully, she knew that she had no business in that part of the house. Gradually it dawned upon her dog mind that her mistress was in trouble, she slunk silently across the room, and nuzzled her nose into Katie's drooping hand. The girl started, then as she saw what it was, exclaimed, "And you too; your love like his is all a lie," and raising her little white hand she struck the dog

fiercely across the head. Bess jumped back with a cry, showed her teeth malignantly for a moment, and then slunk from the room noiselessly as she had entered it.

Katie paced the floor with impatient strides. She had believed in him so long. All was over between them now; and her eyes sparkled, her hands clenched, and she even stamped on the carpet with her little foot as she thought how dearly she had loved him. She didn't now, oh, no! he had cured her thoroughly of that. She would write to him at once, and let him know she was aware of his treachery.

She walked to her writing-table, got out pens, ink and paper, though her hand shook a little as she did so. Sat down and wrote this letter.

“After a silence of weeks, you leave it to a woman to forge the fable that shall account for it. I have been told

of your folly. I have been told that you have ceased to love me. I have been told that you loved another; aye, well enough to risk life for her. All, I refused to believe. My faith was such in your loyalty, that I declared your condemnation should come but from your own hand or your own lips; yet you send it from the hand of another. You might have spared me this final insult. I have shed tears enough for you, Fortie, Heaven knows! I don't think now I could weep to save my life. My eye-balls seem seared since they read that letter. Your duel, talk of the country-side; and you send me by another an apocryphal account of a carriage accident. It is done! all is over between us. You have reduced my love to ashes, past the power of rekindling. Was it well to treat her so, who so trusted you? As father says, men of your class look upon the hearts of girls like me as mere toys for their amusement. I have done. I trust we

shall never meet again — that if we do, God may give me grace to forgive him who has wrecked my life on its threshold. I can't even honestly say now, that I hope you will never experience the misery I do at this moment. For ever, Good-bye.

“KATE MOSELEY.”

Rather a rhapsodical letter; but the girl was young, her feelings had been wound up to high tension for some days, and fever was coursing through her veins.

“It is all over, father, between me and Fortie Merrington,” said Kate, when with flushed cheeks she descended to tea. “I have written to tell him so.”

“Ye're right, lass. I'd thought better things of him; but on the whole I'm main glad it's all over between ye. The less we hear of him now the better. D—n him!” and albeit not given to

swearing, Birkett Moseley launched his curse grimly between his teeth.

It was some days before Katie was seen in the parlour again, for the fever so long lying latent now fairly claimed her for its own, and those that watched her in her wanderings heard enough of Fortie Merrington. Was he the cause of her illness? in part, the anxiety caused by the breaking off her engagement kindled the fever lying dormant within her.

CHAPTER XII.

SOILED GLOVES.

TIME slips away. Fortie Merrington has returned to England, and his arm shows now no symptoms of that *petit jeu de guerre* at Dieppe. Harried by the liabilities incessantly pouring in upon him. Staggered by the mass of testimony he has accumulated against himself, and stung to the soul by Katie's letter, he has acquiesced silently in his sentence of dismissal. He has written neither a line of exculpation nor disavowal. Indeed, Fortie is so taken up just now in striving to hold his own against the flood-tide of difficulties that he is called upon to breast, that he has not much time for reflection.

It may be remembered that Horace De Driby had employed one Phinny to quietly procure possession of as many of Fortie's bills as might happen to be in the discounting market. To young men living Fortie's life, the limit of bills means only the limit of power to negotiate them, and this is a climax that Fortie is rapidly approaching. Horace De Driby, by the agency of the "social spider," has been kept pretty accurately informed of his cousin's difficulties. He has done what he could to break off the engagement between him and Kate, and aided by fortuitous circumstances he has succeeded, his sole object therein being to keep Fortie away from St. Helens. The time has now come, he opines, when a decent amount of legal bullying in the way of writs, duns and refusals to renew will induce him to fly the country. That is now Horace's object, and he is gradually putting the machinery of the law in motion to that effect.

I am not going to say that Katie's breaking off her engagement with him had much to say to Fortie's pursuit of the railroad to ruin, he had engaged "a special" on that line long before the Dieppe duel; but his attachment for her had made him at times think, and loathe and despise the life he now led. It made practically but little difference. He wanted now sixty miles an hour out of the engine and no reflection or retrospects, instead of about forty garnished with qualms of conscience. The result in both cases would be precisely similar, only as it stood the terminus would be arrived at a little sooner.

Jaded, beat and dejected, he strolls through Kensington Gardens, waiting almost impatiently for the coming of the end that he knows is so surely approaching. All the weariness of late hours and perpetual gambling are upon him, and he feels that it will be almost a relief when the fierce struggle is over. Suddenly,

Lizzie Jerningham meets him face to face. He has never seen her since that day he placed her in a cab in the Bayswater Road.

“Mr. Merrington, I’m so glad to see you. I have wanted to so much for so many weeks now.”

“Yes,” replied Fortie, as he shook hands, “I ought to have called on you before; but I have been ill, and since I recovered have been much engaged.”

“Fortie Merrington, I know all. I know what your illness has been. I know you risked your life sooner than hear me traduced. How can I thank you?” and the tears stood in the actress’s dark eyes. “But it was foolish of you—very. It’s one of the crosses of our profession, that our truth and honour are often made light of by the world. Some of us give good occasion; those of us that don’t, but earn our bread honestly, share in the shame. Still, Fortie, I can but thank you. It’s something to have made one friend who

can do one the justice of believing a woman may be both an actress and a lady."

"My dear Lizzie, I only did what men are wont to do when insulted!"

"It is like you to say so; hush!" she continued, interrupting him as he was about to speak. "I know I shall see but little more of you. Walk through the Gardens with me this once, won't you, Fortie?"

"Of course I will. What do you mean?"

"Mean!" said the actress sadly, "that you are on the verge of ruin. I warned you long ago to beware of Mr. Halden, why, why could you not take my advice. You know it is true. What becomes of you when ruined I don't know, but I do know London sees you no more."

"There's something in what you say, Lizzie. I daresay it is no very great secret that I have quarrelled with my

uncle, and am next door to broke. As you say, I don't know what becomes of us then ; but there never was a man who looked more like making the discovery than I do just now."

"Oh, Fortie, Fortie ! can't anything be done ? I've not much money, but I have saved a little. You can take all there is, and give it me back when you are through your difficulties."

Fortie's blue eyes opened wide. Katie had cast him off in his first real scrape without even waiting to hear what he had to say, and here was this girl prepared to throw the whole of her hardly won earnings into his lap. He forgot that he had fought for the honour of one while engaged to the other. It makes a difference. We know the actress was in love with him beforehand, and it was not likely that the Dieppe affair had done much towards quenching her passion.

"Lizzie," he replied at last, slowly,

“I don’t know how to thank you, you’ve offered what perhaps not a man of my acquaintance, bar Fripley Furnival, would have done. But if I am broke, I’ve not turned blackguard. I’m not going to take your hard-won money to pay for my own folly and extravagance. I know you mean it, and if I don’t thank you it is because I don’t know how.”

“The pride of you men!” sighed the actress. “In your death throes, I presume,” she continued, bitterly, “the mouse must not help the lion.”

“Do be reasonable, Lizzie. You know I cannot do this. You ought to despise me yourself if I did, and,” said Fortie, with a half smile, “I would fain keep your good opinion if I can.”

“Can—do you think I would ever believe ill of you?”

For the first time it dawned across Fortie’s mind that this woman loved him. He could not but contrast her last speech

with the letter of her who had condemned him unheard — on strong circumstantial evidence it might be, but she had never called upon him to plead. Still he knew that he did not love Lizzie, and he paused ere he replied.

“I don’t know,” he said at last. “I hope not, at all events, till I deserve it. We would all fain,” he continued, with a faint smile, “have somebody believe that there is still some good left in us; that, despite all our follies, we are not lost past redemption.”

They walked on in silence. The actress’s feelings were so thoroughly wound up, that she dared not trust herself to speak; while Fortie was now keenly alive to the delicacy of the situation. He felt that the next sentence he uttered, might lead Lizzie to betray sentiments that he could hardly respond to. The chivalry innate in him (a rare feeling now-a-days) would spare her this pain if possible. He could not be but

touched by her disinterested wish to serve him. True, she knew of his engagement to Kate, and could not possibly be aware that all was over between him and that yellow-haired girl down in the country, which should prove some safeguard. Then he mused, involuntarily, if it would not have been better for him had fate led him to love Lizzie in the first instance, instead of fixing his affections on that sandy foundation on which they were now shipwrecked.

As for Lizzie, she had lowered her veil, and only thought bitterly, "He loves me not! He never will. Why, oh! why did I ever know him, or not know him before that other stood between us?"

It is hard when the idol we have set up not only rejects our sacrifices, but even prohibits our prayers; when the love we have nurtured and tended first fairly comprehends that the sympathetic sunshine it so craves for is wanting;

that the chill frost of indifference is all that is left to it. That knowledge bites deep into the heart of man, but the tendrils of woman's affection die down like annual plants in winter; they may, generally do, blossom again, but never with the brightness of that first real passion.

But the Bayswater Road is reached at last, and once more Fortie places the actress in a cab.

"Good-bye," she said. "Promise me one thing, that you will write to me occasionally, even if—if it should be to tell me you are married."

"Willingly. It is so kind of you to take any interest in a man so near ruined as I am, that I shall only be too glad to think there is one left who cares to hear what becomes of me. So few friends as I have, I can't afford to lose the best and truest. You need not expect wedding cards, Lizzie. I shall never, I suppose, marry now."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the actress, anxiously.

"Too long a story to tell you now, but I have met the usual fate of soiled gloves. God bless you, Lizzie, and if I didn't say much, don't think I am the less grateful for your generous offer. It was like you all over, thinking of anyone rather than yourself."

"But, Fortie, I don't understand," cried the actress, with flushed face and sparkling eyes.

"No; but you will some day," and lifting his hat, Merrington gave the cabman the address and departed.

Lizzie drove off in a whirl of conflicting emotion. How that sorrowful walk across Kensington Gardens had come to terminate in a gleam of sunshine, she hardly knew. From what he had said, Fortie's engagement must be dissolved, how she did wish he had said that much a little sooner, so that she might have learned the whole truth. Meanwhile Lizzie felt

that her love was not quite the hopeless passion which had brought the hot tears to her eyes some short half hour ago.

CHAPTER XIII.

DONCASTER.

THE scene changes. Kensington Gardens, with their glorious trees, are replaced by the wild open landscape of the town moor at Doncaster. Yes, it is the Leger week; and not only is all Yorkshire there to see, but half Lincolnshire to boot has crossed the Humber to support their champion, who took first honours at Epsom in a snow-storm. Yes, the Doncaster revel has begun, with its strange mixture of sport, gambling, drunkenness, jollity, and street preaching. Why is the latter so prevalent at this town? Do missionaries here serve their novitiate? Of a verity, if you can preach a Yorkshire man out of backing "his fancy" for

“t’ Leger” or “Coop,” you may justly hope great results from your eloquence.

The pretty little town is full to overflowing, “The Reindeer” turns up its nose at you, while the barmaids thereof can hardly serve glasses of sherry, and answer questions fast enough, strenuously as they strive to meet the fierce demand for liquor and information. “The Salutation” swarms with tight-trousers and low-crowned hats. Every box in the long, straggling stable-yard is occupied, and the jealousy with which they are locked denotes the presence of the terribly high-bred cattle therein. The town, as was well remarked some two or three years back by a writer in “All the Year Round,” is impregnated with “t’ Leger and ould John Scott,” not quite so much of the latter element perhaps, as in days of yore; for alas! the span of man’s life is soon bridged over, and the real wizard of the North, originator of so many surprises in the great race, waxes old. Steam-

ing, bubbling, running over, the excitement is perceptible, all along the causeway, from the doors of "The Salutation" back past "The Reindeer," running up the broad steps of the Subscription rooms (last licensed gambling house in the kingdom), trickling away down cross alleys leading from the main street to the grassy paddock, where yearlings fetch fabulous prices, flowing back by other cross streets and mysterious channels, and finally surging once more round the steps of "the rooms," all culminating in that momentuous question "What's to win t' Leger?" Lodgings range at fabulous prices, for the little town is Yorkshire all over, and would fain shear the southerner in somewise, though for the matter of that it puts its clippers quite as sharply into the north country fleeces when it gets the chance. To know what imagination can depict to itself as a bedroom, you should come a little late to Doncaster in the race week without pre-

viously writing for rooms, and want one.

Fortie Merrington has come down with two or three friends, and the party have established themselves in lodgings. That his bolt is nearly shot, we are already aware. Fortie himself already contemplates dreamily the Nemesis that awaits those who dedicate their entire energy to expending capital, instead of the accumulation thereof. He pictures to himself sometimes what the end will be, and wonders where his destiny may have carried him by this time next year. The term destiny is a very good substitute for the more accurate definition folly (to speak mildly), and much in vogue amongst those who scorn the prosaic life prescribed by living within a limited income. Most excitements in this life mingle their joys with their sorrows, but the former come first and who reckes of the thorns in the roses,

“Repentance is the weight
Of undigested meals ate yesterday.”

Ah, me! but those attacks of indigestion sometimes last a man a lifetime. A year or two of feverish excitement is apt to leave stings that cease but with our lives.

But away with moralizing. Have not the whole party come down to win a large stake over the greatest certainty of modern times? Have they not all backed, at long prices, that marvellous dark three year old for the Great Yorkshire Handicap? and is not Doncaster but another garden of Bendemeer to them? What know they of the proverb of 'Climbing trees in the Hesperides,' and cramming your pockets with the leaves instead of the pippins.

Small account take they of Mr. Boyes and his cynical remark. They have never read him most likely, better for them perhaps if they had. A warm September morning, though ever and anon a slight scudding shower suggests the propriety of umbrellas and waterproofs being kept

handy. The old Town Moor is thronged, though no such crowd as will surge over it to-morrow to witness the contest for the St. Leger is this day collected. The Ring roars, shrieks and screams after the manner of that excitable element, but our party are not even within the precincts of the Grand Stand. They have backed Trismegistus in London, and steadfast of purpose will not be allured into other speculation. When you have found gold, what use is there in further prospecting. They have got a quiet barouche to themselves on the course, and propose to see their triumph from it. They smoke placidly, and pay but slight attention to the proceedings till the numbers go up for the Great Yorkshire Handicap. They walk down to the rails then to see their pet canter. He strides past, fine as a star in point of condition, with long low easy action, docile as a sheep in his jockey's hands.

“What are they betting against Tris-

megistus inside?" inquired Fortie, from a stout florid man, who emerging from the betting-ring had just crossed the course.

"Threes to one—he's first favourite, and I'm blessed if I don't think now he'll win. I never believed in him till I saw him, but he's the best looking colt I've seen this many a day."

Triumphant glances were interchanged between Fortie and his friends, as they made their way back to the carriage. Three false starts, in all of which Trismegistus behaves with perfect propriety, then down drops the flag, and the eighteen runners for the Great Yorkshire Handicap are away. At the Red House turn there are but six left with a chance in the race; at the distance but three; opposite the stand it looks for a moment like a match, and then Trismegistus shoots out and wins easily by two lengths.

"By Jove! what a *coup*!" cried young

Silverton, of the Guards, from the box of the barouche. "The good thing at a long shot has come off for once, Fortie. No end of thanks to you, old fellow, for the tip. I've collared eight hundred, and that's a stake for an impoverished British subaltern. Deuce take it, I'll pay lots of worthy people. I adjure you all solemnly, to see that I don't make away with it during the week. What did you do yourself, Merrington?"

"Five thousand in," said Fortie, quietly; he had been learning the art of winning and losing with serenity pretty assiduously all this past year or so, and displayed an unruffled tranquillity most creditable to his time of life. Absorbed in the race themselves, his companions had had no leisure to note the quivering lips that could scarce keep the cigar between them during the running, nor to hear the long drawn sigh of relief with which he saw Trismegistus' triumph. Redemption at all events for the pre-

sent, if not salvation from utter ruin.

“Now for lunch,” cried Charlie Silverton, and what a joyous meal that quartette made of it can be easily imagined. They had all won big stakes, Merrington the largest, Silverton the least. Lobster salad and champagne never were so good. It is ever so when you are winning, whatever may be the form in which Fortune is dispensing her favours. At last, flushed with champagne and the capricious goddess’ smiles, the guardsman announces his intention of penetrating the arcanum of the Stand.

“Now don’t be a fool, Silverton,” cried Fortie, “and go backing anything else to-day. We’ve won our money ; will have one good bet on the Leger to-morrow and leave for town after it’s over, that’s my programme.”

“Right, thou Solon of the turf,” laughed Charlie, and disappeared.

The trio that remained, lounged back in the carriage, and enjoyed their cigars

placidly. They listened vaguely to the songs poured out for their delectation by a good-looking girl, accompanied by a man with a harp, and whose spirited rendering of the "Flying Trapeze" had made Fortie throw her half-a-sovereign. Quick at reading the signs of the times, like all her class, the girl sang on; she knew that was a winning carriage full. Applause, and a couple more half-crowns had followed her last effort, and then thinking herself quite safe in the present instance, she dashed off into an effusion she was wont to be rather chary of giving vent to, it was apt to call forth a fierce "go spin, you jade, go spin," when luck had run hard against the auditors thereof; but no fear of that she thought on this occasion, as she trilled out the lay of "the disconsolate plunger," with its burden of

"There's a choking in my throat, and my thumbs do
prick ;

It really makes me sick, not a winner can I pick ;

I cannot turn a trick, though I lay it on thick.

Oh ! there's a choking in my throat, and my thumbs do prick."

Encouraged by the laughter she evoked, the girl spiritedly continued her song, when Charlie Silverton dashed breathlessly up to the carriage.

"Oh Lord, Fortie !" he exclaimed, "here's a go," and the Guardsman's elongated visage showed he was the bearer of evil tidings.

"What is it ?" chorussed the whole carriage.

"Gad, you know they have objected to Trismegistus, they say he's over weight a good three pounds and never declared. There's an awful scrimmage over there about it, the stewards have all met to decide the point, and Jack Kennington offered me sixty to forty the second got the stakes."

Never was there such a change as came over the party in the barouche ; the laughing faces of a minute ago were now

replete with gravity. In a second they were all out of the carriage, and making their way rapidly to the ring. No doubt about Silverton's story being correct on their arrival there. Backers of Trismegistus were endeavouring to hedge their winnings in every direction, so ominous was the objection looked on. No decision had as yet been issued, but a strong opinion prevailed that it would prove fatal.

Fortie listened like a man in a dream ; it never occurred to him to try to save the two or three hundred pounds he had backed the horse for. In his situation that was a mere *bagatelle*. The big stake he had deemed won was the only thing that could be of any use to him. He knew it was his last cast of the dice. They had not to wait long. Another ten minutes and forth came the fiat. "Trismegistus having carried considerably overweight, without declaration of the same, is disqualified ; the stakes and all bets

therefore, go to Lazy Lass, who was placed second in the Great Yorkshire Handicap."

Moodily Fortie and his companions walked back to their lodgings that Tuesday evening. Deep drinking was the order of the night to drown that cruel disappointment, though it by no means bore the same consequences to any other of the party that it did to Merrington. Then came the adjournment to "the Rooms," where Fortie plunged with chequered success into all the vagaries of roulette and hazard. He won a good deal, and then lost it; but finally left off, if anything, rather the better than the worse for his reckless gambling.

But I have not space, nor would my readers probably have patience to follow a broken man through all the death throes of his gaming career. Suffice it to say that Fortie Merrington left Doncaster on Friday night ruined past redemption.

Not only hopeless of meeting in any way the bills, duns, &c., now imperative for payment, but knowing also the impossibility of settling the liabilities incurred during the present week. Next week must see him proclaimed a defaulter.

What were his feelings? the mad excitement had still scarcely died out of his veins yet; there was a reckless sensation of quietude that the fierce struggle of the last year was over. About the future he had as yet not thought. Subject unpleasant of reflection when it shall, as it indubitably must, force itself upon his attention.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLIVE BRANCH MISCARRIES.

DOWN at St. Helens Sir Giles is slowly wearing out his allotted span of life. A close observer, indeed, would have cavilled at the word "slowly," the old man begins to show unmistakable signs that the machinery of his existence is breaking down. When you have drained pleasure's luscious chalice to the dregs in the days of your hot youth, the days of your old age are wont to be embittered thereby. "Hearing the chimes at midnight," with the boon companions of two-and-twenty or thereabouts, reproduces itself, as immutably as history, when the springs of life begin to give way. But then, alas ! we count the hours

as we toss wearily on that restless couch, from which those youthful follies have so effectually banished sleep. Constitution, like patrimony, can be got through wondrous quickly, and pecunious liabilities are not the only ones we run up in our days of puppyhood.

The Baronet's early life had been as recklessly lived as that of any man of that hard-going generation. Not much wonder that, scorpion like, those cherished vices of bye-gone days stung sharply now. He is past seventy years of age, and the stately figure is rather bent. Still it is but of late that his health has begun visibly to fail him. There is no actual complaint, but a general decay of strength and vitality, and that proceeding with rapid strides—in short, as I said before, the machine is nearly worn out. The quarrel with his nephew has told its tale, it is sad to arrive near the end of life's journey, and feel that none of your kith or kind feel loving solicitude on your account.

Sir Giles was far too proud to show it; but like the fox beneath the Spartan boy's cloak, that rupture with Fortie gnawed fiercely at his entrails. He often craved for intelligence of the graceless nephew he still loved in the depths of his cynic nature, but except from Horace he never heard of him now. Indeed, the Rector could tell little beyond that Fortie's money difficulties were thickening around him. Since that fatal Doncaster, Merrington had abandoned all his old haunts—it was natural; proclaimed a defaulter, tantamount in his social world to a decree of outlawry, it was not likely that he would put in an appearance at the Thalamus, and places of that denomination. He was young, and had not yet acquired the brazenry of more mature years, and felt his position keenly. Unlike the defalcating bank director of the day who, just escaping a criminal indictment, parades his misfortunes before the public eye with an air of martyrdom,

Fortie shrunk from meeting any of his old acquaintances. Consequently, Horace De Driby had now lost all sight of his cousin, his London correspondents had nothing to recount concerning him.

Fortie is gathering the harvest attendant on what is pleasantly denominated "sowing your wild oats," the one agricultural experiment that despite wind or weather is certain to produce not only a heavy crop, but in all probability an unwished for succession of such. He is beginning to thoroughly comprehend what it is to be a hunted animal. Not only is he beset by duns—not only are writs out against him in all directions, but he is learning now what it is to find difficulty in finding the shillings necessary for daily existence. He has mastered also another lesson in life, and found how little studs and rings are worth, comparatively, when estimated at a pawnbroker's valuation. Shift of residence to avoid arrest has been constant of late,

and each move is a declension of an octave in the social scale. He doesn't think much about it, he makes no struggle to avert the destiny that seems to await him, he wonders in a dreamy sort of way how it will all end. What can it matter now? Who, except Fripley Furnival and the actress will glance with a moistened eye at the brief record of his death—if such it should come to; and in these days of solitary wanderings and brain-heated musings, Fortie dwells more than is good to think of, on abruptly terminating the fiasco, called his life, by his own hand.

Sir Giles, meanwhile, as the miasma of the grave seems to gather more heavily around him, feels a yearning for the sight of that favourite sister's child, that grows day by day more irrepressible. Weaker than usual one afternoon, he did what he had not as yet done in the course of his cynical career, he swallowed his pride with one mighty gulp, and wrote a letter to Fortie.

“You might forget,” it ran, “the somewhat natural anger and irritation of an old man, on first hearing that his favourite nephew had entered in an engagement which, in a worldly point of view, can but be regarded as imprudent. I am getting old, boy, and my days at St. Helens are numbered, the sands fall fast in the hour glass of my life, and I feel that that glass has been turned for its last time. Come to me, Fortie, once more, and let all be forgotten that has passed. Make some allowance for the petulance of one whose dictum has so long been law around him, and for the sake of your mother’s memory, let me see you once more. I cannot, even now, approve your engagement, but the subject need not be touched upon by either of us. If I have any claim upon your gratitude, as either uncle or guardian, let me see you next week.”

Knowing what we do of Sir Giles’s

character, we may judge what it cost him to pen that letter. Nothing indeed but his weakness and loneliness could have ever broken through the crust of pride and cynicism, in which he had for years enveloped himself. Fortie knew his uncle well, and his open generous nature was of the very kind to respond frankly and immediately to such an overture. But, alas ! that epistle is destined to wax yellow in the pigeon-holes of the porter's letter-rack at the Thalamus, before Fortie comes to claim it.

The days pass by, and no word from Fortie arrives at St. Helens. Sir Giles grows more bitter than ever. It had been gall to his proud spirit to write that letter, a letter in which he had humbled himself much. All the old cynicism returns with redoubled force. It ever does on your men of the world, who having once stooped to throw aside their mask of indifference, find themselves met with the very weapons they have just cast

down. "More of the De Driby in him, than I thought for," he muttered, with a sneer. "He's true to the instincts of his race, and as unforgiving as the bitterest of our line. *Je me suis trompé*, but he shall do me justice, and find when all is over, that I, also, can be true to our creed of past generations. Yes, forgiveness is worse than a mistake, it is a folly." Still, with all that the old man grew weaker daily, and did not shut his eyes to the fact that the time for proving his inflexibility of purpose waxed near.

And do you think Katie's has been a bed of rose leaves since she sent off that cold, cutting, contemptuous epistle to her lover. No, indeed! For days, aye, for weeks, the girl clung to the hope that a letter of justification would arrive from Fortie. She has ceased to hope that now. Bitterly she regrets that, in her wrath, she so completely shut out all chance of exculpation to her lover. She knows now, as women often do when

it is too late, that she sentenced him without giving him any opportunity of defence. "He was guilty," she argues fiercely to herself, "or he would have written," yet instinctively she feels in her own heart that he loved her loyally, and that that cruel letter left but little opening for reply. The bright, sunshiny girl of three months back has grown pale, and spiritless, past belief. She makes much of her father in a listless sort of fashion, but never volunteers Scotch ballads, and the Laird-o'-Cockpen in the evening now. Bess, that vagrant retriever is in high favour, and lives at her young mistress' side. Petting her, seems in a far-fetched round-about way to be in some sort, to Katie's mind, forgiving her master, and the dog which had taken to her with the cynical indifference that was characteristic of its nature in the first instance, seems almost aware of the fact, and follows her about like her shadow.

Birkett Moseley is not blind to all that is going on. He notes his darling's pale cheeks and listless manner keenly. More than once a fierce execration upon Fortie Merrington escapes his lips, as he sees how the sunlight seems to have died out of Katie's life. Not being in love, he takes the common sense view of the case, believes the story of the countryside, and thinks that his little girl has been made the mere plaything of a dissipated young man's idle hours. That the old Baronet is breaking fast too is palpable, and he ponders sometimes as to how he will dispose of all the unentailed property. Moseley has no great liking for Horace; but he has a sort of instinctive reverence for him as a genuine De Driby. It must go he thinks to him now, and with his present feelings towards Fortie, he trusts it may. There was a time when he, in conjunction with many more of the tenantry, hoped that bright Fortie Merrington, with his pleasant smile and

genial word for every one, would be the master of most of the estate. Now he would rather that the grim saturnine Rector should succeed to everything, than that the fair, but false-faced stripling, who had stole his daughter's heart away, should inherit an acre.

Horace De Driby alone of all the people we are concerned with at St. Helens, was satisfied with the turn things had taken. Even the Reverend Filander, immersed though he was in a most serious flirtation with Mrs. Briarly, a flirtation which had far passed the Rubicon, and sent Cupid's barometer up to matrimony—even he remarked, and grieved like the good-hearted little man he was over Katie's altered looks, and felt as much wrath as was compatible with his mild gentle nature regarding Fortie. Had he ever seen Don Giovanni, he would have thought the hero of that opera a tolerable correct representation of Merrington, and marvelled that “the statue”

was so long descending from its pedestal.

But Horace, I need scarcely say, was well content with the state of his game. He little knew how near a chance it had run of going against him. That letter lying in the box of the hall-porter of the Thalamus might have produced a very different combination of the pieces had it reached Fortie's hands in ordinary course ; but four years nearly will come and go before he breaks that seal, and learns too late how his cynical old uncle melted to him at the last. A source of regret to Fortie for many a year afterwards, who would have liked much to part in kindness with the fierce old Pagan who had ever been kindly to him with the one exception.

CHAPTER XV.

WESTWARD HO !

[N a scantily furnished second floor room in Kentish Town, Fortie Merriington paces slowly up and down by the light of a solitary candle, and muses over his well nigh desperate position. Putting your hands into empty pockets is bad ; but there is a depth of misery that transcends this, the not finding pockets to put your hands in. You must have been either very poor or a pickpocket to thoroughly understand this.

Yes ! this is what plunging, *baccarât* and heavy whist end in mostly. You hear of the lucky man who wins such a stake over the Blue Ribbon of the year. Of Fortune's favourite who breaks the

bank at Homburg, but of the many that perish in the fray not a word. As was observed in those old classical days, "the votive tablets of those who escaped are suspended in the temple, while those who were shipwrecked are forgotten." They depart and make no moan. The civilization of our age teaches us this, to suffer in silence; "*le gémissement pour le vieux*," moaning is for the old, quoth Victor Hugo. Ah! no. Not in these days, my elderly compatriots, you would hardly be so indecent.

Fortie thoroughly comprehends what society demands of him. He has disappeared and made no sign. Suddenly he stops in his walk, and empties the contents of one of his pockets on the table. They are merely a few coins, one gold, the rest silver, yet they seem to exercise a strange fascination to him.

"My last sovereign," he muttered, "and Phinny's sleuth hounds hard upon the trail. Why fly further? Why live?

I've nothing left to live for. Katie, my friends, the world, Fortune, all repudiate me. Why the devil couldn't Halden shoot straighter and cut this tangled knot for me. What a duffer poor old Jackson would have thought him, winging his game in that wise. Fifty drops of laudanum, or the crack of a pistol, and there's no more worry, and one will

“ ‘ See what the darkness discovers,
Whether the grave-pit be shallow or deep.’

Seems like curring it too. Still, what is the use of putting your back to the wall when you have nothing left to fight for. It's no use thinking, and ‘so to bed,’ as Lady Macbeth says. Pleasant to stretch your head upon the pillow, and hope you may never see the morrow's sun, and that's about my feeling now. Ah, Katie! if I could kiss you once more, and tell you that I had never swerved from my love, I think I could die happy.”

These affections of ours, why will they

so often run in the wrong channels.

Fortie Merrington, in his misery, thinks only of the girl who has lost her faith in him, and penned that cold letter of dismissal. He never remembers that love, won unsought, that shone out on him from Lizzie Jerningham's dark eyes but a few weeks back in Kensington Gardens, though he had awoke to that knowledge at last. He has not forgot her generous offer, one of those things that preserve our pure faith in womanhood in such times as these; but he dimly recollects the love that prompted it. She is the nobler nature of the two. Her love once given, Lizzie would never have descended to jealousy. To think that Katie did not love him as truly would be a mistake, but it is not given to women more than men to love alike.

“Trust me not at all, or all in all,”

was Katie's motto. Had he told her the whole truth at once, she had been loyal

to him. But the actress could have quoted Mrs. Browning's glorious lines,

“ Unless you can dream that his faith is fast,
Through behoving and unbehoving ;
Unless you can *die* when the dream is past,
Oh ! never call it loving,”

and murmured yes, as she did so. Either was a love well worth winning, as that of any true woman's always is. But success in two places is a complication, let us trust, men are not often called upon to decide on.

Had things been well with him, it is possible Fortie might have gone to St. Helens to seek a personal explanation ; but as a broken ruined man, it was not likely that would occur to him.

If the Trismegistus affair had turned out, as in verity it should have done, I think he and Katie would have met ; and while he kissed away her doubts, she would have wept away her letter, washing it literally out with her tears. But the cards played well for Horace De

Driby all through, a horse not winning, and an unreceived letter may change the destiny of nations, let alone men. Not answering a letter was at one time alleged as "a first cause" of the Abyssinian war, though I take it the origin of that, like most wars one has read of, is still involved in obscurity. We certainly did not declare war with France when Gladiateur won the Derby, but I candidly own, I think it was as good a *casus belli* as many we have fought for.

Fortie lights a cigarette, two or three packets yet remain from the wreck, and whiffs silently at it before seeking his pillow. A stumbling on the stairs, a question or two asked, and then a sharp authoritative tap at his door. "Phinny & Co., at last," he mutters, "well, why not? Good that, perhaps, as anything else. Come in," he exclaims. The door opens, and discloses Fripley Furnival.

"My dear Fortie," he exclaims, "I have had the devil's own hunt to find

you. If it hadn't been for a pal of mine in the detective business, I never should have succeeded. What could have induced you to utterly withdraw yourself from the ken of all your old friends?"

"Pooh! you know as well as I do, that I am ruined, that I haven't—"

"Don't talk nonsense! Good gracious! half the pleasantest fellows I ever met have been that. On the Stock Exchange they look upon it in the light of catching the measles, whooping cough, or any other of the diseases incidental to early life. Don't call it ruined, either, that's much too tragical a name for it; say 'knocked out,' fashionable slang, and expresses the idea in softer language. Now give me a cigarette and some brandy-and-water, if you have it. Men generally have *that* when they're broke, if they've nothing else. But for God's sake don't seek that way out of the scrape," and Fripley scanned his unwitting host narrowly.

"No, old fellow," returned Fortie, with a melancholy smile as he attended to Furnival's demands. "I have wished Jim Halden had shot straighter at Dieppe, but I have not taken to that."

"Thank God!" returned the other. "I never saw a case past mending as long as that didn't stand in the way. Now I'll tell you what I have come for. You must get out of the country, and that immediately, and I have promised someone, who takes an interest in you, never to leave you till you are safe on board ship, so don't give any trouble please."

Though Fripley rattled away, he felt rather sad about what Merrington's future was to be.

"Good advice, perhaps," replied the other, "but unluckily I can't take it."

"Why not?"

"Hum! Well, you see that sovereign? that's my last."

"Ah! we foresaw that, some of us. Cunning beggars ain't we? The world

is not quite so black as folks deem it. I have brought here for your exclusive use and benefit a hundred to start with, and I recommend America to your notice by to-morrow's packet."

"Awfully good of you, Fripley, but I'm not going to take your hundred."

"No, indeed, you're not though, I heartily wish you were. The incessant exigencies of civilized life, such as kid gloves, cigars, and dry champagne, never leave me with a sovereign in my pocket. Three or four friends, whom you won't guess in the course of an Atlantic passage, as you never saw them do a good turn to anyone yet, insist on lending you this till you are round again. We've got you a passage on board the Cunard boat, I'm going down to Liverpool with you. When, in trans-atlantic vernacular, you've 'made your pile' you can come back, give us a rattling dinner, recount your adventures, and repay them."

"It's very good of whoever it might

be—yourself I suspect; but I’ve no heart to struggle any longer,” replied Merriington.

“Look here, Fortie,” said the other. “Listen to me! You can’t do anything here. You must try to do something now. Man must live, and you’ve spent everything. You can’t see it, but I believe it will be the making of you. This money will give you time to look about for a little, and before it’s gone you will have hit upon something, that at all events will give you bread and cheese. You will fare probably something like the Culmbach Princes, whom Mr. Carlyle tells us ‘had intricate fortunes, service in foreign parts, much wandering about, sometimes considerable scarcity of cash;’ pooh! nothing;” continued Fripley, as he lit a fresh cigarette, “normal condition of all military men.”

“Jove! Fripley; you’ve cheered me up more than a bit. I don’t know what the deuce I’m fit for; but you’re right,

I may make a fresh start there and I shan't here—I'll go."

"Now you're becoming sensible. Your late training ought to go for something in teaching you how to 'face a facer.' By the way; do you recollect meeting that American, Seth Thorndale, at Basinghall's Greenwich dinner last year?"

"Yes. Met him again afterwards. Manager of a theatre in New York, wasn't he?"

"Just so;" continued Fripley. "Now you can't have any difficulty in finding him out there. He seemed a good sort, and my advice is, seek him, tell him the state of the case, and ask him to give you a start."

"He gave me a general kind of invitation to look him up, if I ever came across the water. But things were different then," said Fortie, sadly.

"Oh, hang it! don't moralize. Of course the fruit was all ripe, the trees were all green, and the weather all sun-

shine, pooh! ever since Eve put her teeth into the first pippin, human nature has experienced the fallacy of apples. You don't live long without seeing the autumnal tints, and the monsoon sooner or later puts out the sunlight. No, keep all those reflections for the mid-Atlantic. Midst the anguish occasioned by a cross sea, your opportunities of moralizing will be great. Take my advice, put up your traps and then lie down—as for me I shall snooze in this chair.”

The first train in the morning saw the pair on their way to Liverpool. Little time though had they to spend in the metropolis of the Mersey. Fortie was just able to purchase a few necessities for the voyage, and then they hurried on board the tender. A quarter of an hour, and he and Fripley stood upon the deck of the great ocean steamer that was to bear him to a new life in a new world. They paced the deck in earnest

talk till the bell rang loudly for "those for shore."

"Good-bye — God bless you, old fellow!" said Fripley, with a hearty hand-grip. "Mind you have promised to write to me often—and always bear in mind, despite the caution of managers and want of enterprise in publishers, I can always help a little if times go hard."

"I know you would; but I'm not going to trouble you in that way. Ten thousand thanks for what you have done. Good-bye."

Fripley stepped into the tender, and with a wave of his hand bid Fortie Merrington farewell for many a day to come. Don't think that Furnival did not feel sad at heart, as he thought of his friend's ruined life and visionary prospects. He had rattled on in his cheerful cynical way, because he deemed that the best talk for Fortie to hear just then; but he had an affection for

him such as men bear often for the friends of their school-boy days ; more especially for those who, younger than themselves, have lived under the ægis of their protection in public school life. Fortie, it may be remembered, had been his fag at Eton, and Furnival had often sheltered the fair-haired boy of those times from the consequences of his juvenile impertinences and misdeeds.

“It’s done now,” he muttered. “I have kept faith with her, at any rate. Will he ever do any good out there? Well, time only can solve that question ; we can but hope. It is certain he would never have even got the chance here at home.

“ ‘ Blossom of broom will never make bread,
Red rose leaves will never make wine ;’

and those that have played and ‘plunged’ have mostly sapped the energy out of their character in the pursuit. He may rally, once well away from it all and the

old associations. Better, at all events, he should go there and try, than moulder his life away in some small continental town. I wish, though, he had sent a message to Lizzie Jerningham. By Jove! what a good girl she is. It is a disgrace to myself, that I should have to be reminded of what I owed to one of my dearest friends by a woman. Aye, and be indebted to her hard-won gold besides for the means of helping him. What selfish extravagant brutes we are! She must have loved Fortie dearly, and he never even sent her a farewell. Wonder whether he knows it? Too far gone with that little thing in the country to see it, I suppose. Not much matter either way for the present. But, by Jove! Lizzie's a girl in a thousand."

CHAPTER XVI.

DEATH OF SIR GILES.

SIR GILES grows weaker and weaker. He has ceased to pass the hall-door now, and confines himself to his own study. Even his satire has become diluted; the very servants miss the old sneering manner. The Baronet himself recognises that his end draws near, and feels that he is battling with an adversary all too strong for him. He sees much of his nephew, Horace, in these days. It is not that he likes him much better than formerly; but we all cling to something when stricken unto death. Men there are, perhaps, here and there, who will drag themselves away to die in solitude, as the brutes do when they have

got their mortal wound ; but as a rule, we would fain have some kindly hand to smooth our last pillow, even if of the faces we have best loved, there are none to look pityingly down upon us.

It is a wild November night :

“ Like a dead man gone to his shroud,
The sun has sunk in a coppery cloud,
And the wind is rising squally and loud,
 With many a stormy token ;
Playing a wild funereal air,
Through the branches bleak, bereaved and bare,
To the dead leaves dancing here and there.”

The sea *aar* that has rolled up from the Wash across the fenlands the last three nights is swept away by the boisterous westerly gale, and the moon shows an ominous haze around her. Old Jackson, staunchest of keepers, is out with his myrmidons to guard his partridges and pheasants. The old man shakes his head, as with one companion he makes his way down in the direction of Gibbet's Nook ; some of the Bletley Moor men have been

rather hard upon the hares down that way lately. The fierce sou'-wester shrieks aloud in its anger as they approach the place, and as it sweeps across the sky the moon sheds her pale light over "the dance of the dead clouds."

"Mercy on us!" muttered the keeper, "Piers Thornton is screaming in real earnest to-night. No use going too near to the Nook, Bill, those Bletley chaps, if so be they're out, 'll never venture down that away. Let's hold a bit nigher to the Moor. I wonder whether it is all true, that those screams are always heard down hereabouts whenever a De Driby's got his call. Poor old Sir Giles, he wunna last long; but if the tale's good for aught he'll never see sunlight the morrow."

"Trua," returned his companion, a rough son of the soil, who had never yet been twenty miles from St. Helens. "Trua, coom away mon, there's them who knoa note, and will tell ye it's the

wind; but we knoa better nor that. Ye ne'er heard Piers Thornton shriek that away that a De Driby wor not the worse for it ere twenty-foor hour were gone. They're a bould fell race; but they raised a feller spirit than themselves when they slew Thornton, the reiver, long since. Ye knoa the old rhyme,

“ ‘ When for nights three the sea-aar rolls,
Teeaming with disembodied souls,
Shrieaks Thornton round his leafless tree;
De Driby then his doom maun dree.’ ”

Hanna the sea aar been up the last three nights thick ?”

“ ‘ Deed it has; poor Sir Giles, I doubt he wunna last till morning. We’ll edge away down here, Bill, I think the neighbourhood of the Nook aint wholesome such nights,” and the teeth of the stout old keeper, who feared nothing of mortal mould, rattled in his head again at the bare thought of encountering the supernatural.

Weak, miserable, superstitious fools

that we are. Shrinking from shadows, yet boldly encountering tangible dangers. Not one in ten thousand of us will ever pretend to have seen a spirit, and yet we believe in them, and in their power to work us evil. Even the sceptics lose their nerves under certain accessories of time and place.

Still, however false their premises, the inference drawn by the keeper and his companion is right. And on this wild November night Sir Giles is dying. He dismissed Horace querulously after sundown, and no one is present in his chamber, none but his old servant and the destroying angel. His sister-in-law had come to him at the beginning of his illness, but he had never liked her; and when his physical powers waxed weak, and his cynical tongue wanted power to control her, he dismissed Mrs. De Driby with well nigh the last stinging epigram that was to fall from his lips. She had overwhelmed him one afternoon with a torrent

of talk, a very "diarrhœa of garrulity," *des langueurs* came heavily over Sir Giles. Wearied past endurance, a flash of the old spirit returned to him.

"There is a point in woman's argument," he observed, "that can only be confuted by flight or a poker, when their rationality ceases and temper and curiosity impel them to seek what men will bear. I have not strength left, Louisa, to have recourse to the first—the second is only in vogue among the lower classes. Your society though charming is a little too much for me at present, pray give what orders you like about the carriage for to-morrow."

Mrs. De Driby gasped with indignation, flounced out of the room and took her departure the next day.

"Your uncle, my dear," she observed to her son, "has become simply unbearable. He can't treat a woman now with even ordinary deference. I gave up the whole afternoon to entertaining him, and

he told me to order my carriage; I never intend to set foot in his house again. I have not the slightest doubt he will leave his property to alms-houses, or hospitals, or something. He's an uncivil old brute after all I have done for him."

Well, poor woman, she had done something for him in former days, though unwittingly. Her pretentious consequence and blue-stockings affectations had afforded the Baronet much amusement in times gone by. But he had grown too feeble to bear with her now.

And so it fell out that Sir Giles lay upon his death bed, unattended save by his faithful valet. The man had been with him twenty years, and spite of his master's whims, passion and cynicism, loved him well. The best part of the sneering remarks that had been so often addressed to him had passed over his head unheeded, being beyond his comprehension. This ever had been a bond between them. The Baronet was wont to be much

tickled at the sight of Thompson's bewildered face when he made him the target for his bitter practice. The doctors had not fancied the end was so near, they had deemed that he might linger a good ten days or so yet.

The dim light of the solitary candle throws a faint light through the old oak-panelled chamber. The flickering fire causes the shadows to come and go about the heavy draperies of the large old-fashioned bed; flashes anon into the folds of the crimson moreen window curtains; lights up now and again that little quaint black walnut table, with its twisted legs and fatal array of phials; gleams round old Thompson's wrinkled brows as he sits half asleep in that big arm-chair beside it, and finally, with a little crash, bursts out into a blaze. Slight as the noise is, it wakes the Baronet. "Has he come?" he exclaims, in anxious tones. "Sef Merrington never failed one yet. The sooner it is over the better. That

passed between us that can only be settled by the pistol. Yes, Wormwood Scrubs will do as well as anywhere. The babbling fool—right, yes; but I'll shoot him if I can. Her honour gone! One asperser will be silent to-morrow, if my hand don't fail me—they'll find it a dangerous name to meddle with. Yes, yes," he muttered, and then he relapsed into incoherent murmuring. His thoughts were wandering far away back to those young days, when he had lived so wild a life about town. Again he turned upon his pillow. "He broke her heart!" he exclaimed, while his dark eyes gleamed with feverish light, "he took her to the country, the coward, and my God! I could do nothing." His lips twitched, and Thompson held some cooling drink to his lips. He was silent for some time, and then he resumed, "My darling Jessie, you, poor Sef, and one other, are all I have ever loved in this world; if it's any consolation to you now, I promise to

take care of the boy. Where is he, Thompson? send for him; quick! I must see him again, it's near over now. Fortie, Fortie! send for him."

Suddenly he raised himself in his bed. "Ah, I remember all now, too late, too late! Fortie! Jessie, forgive—" and he fell back with convulsed features.

Thompson rang the bell violently, and then raised his senseless master in his arms. A groom was despatched for the nearest doctor, and another to Horace De Driby; but ere they were well in the saddle Sir Giles slept the sleep that knows no waking.

There was a grand stately funeral, to which the surrounding gentry sent their carriages, and wherein Horace figured as chief mourner; and then the very few whom it concerned assembled in the big drawing-room to hear the reading of the will, which Sir Giles' London solicitor had brought down from town in his

pocket. It was very short. The testator bequeathed everything to his dearly beloved nephew, Horace De Driby, with the exception of some unimportant legacies to his old servants, Thompson, Jackson, &c. One clause only was remarkable. By that, five thousand pounds was bequeathed to Kate Moseley, conditional on her marriage with Fortie Merriington within three years of the date of Sir Giles' decease. Should this said marriage not take place within the prescribed time, she was to receive five hundred pounds in memory of the testator's regard for her, the remainder to revert to Horace the residuary legatee.

The new baronet had listened with much composure to the reading of the will. The lawyer had apprised him pretty nearly as to how he was affected thereby, but the codicil concerning Kate Moseley arrested his attention, and puzzled him greatly.

Horace De Driby bear in mind, although

prepared to be thoroughly unscrupulous in his struggle for the rich inheritance that had now fallen to him, had had, thanks to his cousin's reckless imprudence, nothing to do but give here and there a slight additional push to that hapless scapegrace in his down-hill career. His bringing his engagement to Katie to the knowledge of Sir Giles, and stimulating Phinny and his crew to measures of extreme severity, had about constituted his active movements against his cousin. They do not seem much, and yet they won him the goal he had aimed at all his life. The major part of poor Fortie's bills and liabilities, Horace had amassed in his own hands. It was the machinery that he put in motion that hunted his unhappy cousin from place to place, and finally compelled him to fly the country. But for that, Fortie would have received Sir Giles' letter, now mouldering at the Thalamus, and who shall say how things might have gone.

Some men are born to good luck, Sir Horace, as we must now call him, was one of these—his cards played themselves. But for the accident of that Dieppe duel, Katie would never have broken with her lover. But for the accident of Trismegistus being overweight, Fortie would probably have sought an interview with his mistress. In either case, it is probable that he would once more have met his uncle and that the quarrel between them would have been healed.

Birkett Moseley was among those present at the reading of the will. If that codocil puzzled the new baronet thoroughly, it bewildered Moseley. "Well," he muttered, "I'm blessed! Sir Giles were a queer 'un to follow always; but this dings me altogether. He were mad as mischief when he first heard Katie and Mr. Fortie were engaged, and now, he leaves her five thousand pounds providing she marries him. What can he mean! only he didn't know there's nought between 'em

now, I'd think it a bit just of his old jibing ways."

Birkett Moseley walked homewards, buried in thought—as we know no one could feel more bitter against Fortie Merrington than he did. Had he not won his darling's heart, only to throw her over for that play-acting woman up in London, and did he not see hourly how Katie sorrowed over that lost love of her's, for all her woman's spirit had induced her to give him his dismissal. She had not broken with him, till she had deemed herself both forgotten and betrayed. And now he had to rake up the old grief and tell her of this strange legacy of the grim Baronet's. No use trying to keep it from her, he thought, though he would have fain done that if possible. But there were too many people cognisant of it. She was sure to hear of it before many weeks were over. Then he wondered what had become of Merrington. No one had heard

aught of him in those parts for many weeks.

Musing in this wise, he arrived at his home. Katie met him at the doorstep.

"Well, father;" she said, "you've seen the last of poor Sir Giles. I'm honestly sorry for him. He was very kind to me till—till things all went wrong. I would have liked much to have seen him once more, if it was but to thank him for his kindness in those days."

"Yes, child, I've been to the funeral, and seen a better man buried nor him who succeeds. Howsomever, I reckon we're all apt to think that away. We forget the faults of them as is gone, and look jealous-like at those that step into their shoes. Not that I ever held this one in much account."

"Who is it?" inquired Katie, tremulously. "You forget, I don't know," and instinctively she felt that if it were Fortie Merrington, she would never be anything to him. For much as she might

steel her heart against acknowledging it, Katie would have done anything now to have recalled that letter of hers ; and still clung to the hope that she and Fortie might meet once more face to face, and all this dark cloud now lying between them be explained away.

“Who should it be, lass, but Horace De Driby—Sir Horace I should say now. But I’ve more than that to tell ye. Come in and gie me my tea, and then we’ll talk it all over.”

Katie did as she was bid, and when that meal was finished with, Moseley lit his pipe and said, “Reckon you’ll be astonished, child ; but you’re mentioned in the will, and heavily too if something unlikely should ever take place.”

“I, father ! I mentioned in Sir Giles’ will !” and the girl’s blue eyes opened wide with astonishment.

“Yes. He’s willed ye five thousand pounds upon one contingency. It’s like him,” he continued meditatively. “Just

one of they jeering bits of humour he was allays so fond of."

"But what is it? What am I to do?" cried Katie.

"What ye'll never do now, lass, with my consent. Marry Fortie Merington."

"I am left five thousand pounds by Sir Giles, upon condition I marry Fortie?" said the girl, and as she spoke a light came into her eyes, and a glow to her heart, to which they had been strangers of late.

"Yes, just one of the old man's jibes, though I can't make out how he knew all was over atween ye."

"Are you sure he did?"

"No, I can't be quite sure of that, I didn't think he did. Ye see, child, you and I kept that matter to ourselves, and whatever folks might think they could know nothing certain."

"Stop, father! let me think;" and for the next ten minutes Katie's pretty brows

were knit, and the blue eyes gazed vacantly into the fire, while Moseley smoked on in portentous silence.

“Father,” she said, at last, “I think I see another explanation of that strange legacy. Sir Giles was very fond of Fortie, and I’ve heard you say took that quarrel with him much to heart, although too proud to show it. Those who knew him well as you did, however, could see that,” and Katie raised her eyes interrogatively to Moseley’s. He nodded assent. “Well,” she continued, “I was the hapless cause of that quarrel, and Sir Giles, remember, liked me well in his way. He never saw Fortie again—he never knew that all was over between us. Don’t you think that it is possible that when he willed everything away from Fortie he might say, I’ll have nothing more to say to him, but if he’s fool enough to wed a girl without a sixpence, I’ll leave her a dowry so that she shan’t come to him quite empty-handed.

More especially when he knew, and had been always very kind to the girl."

"By G—d, wench, you've hit it! I'll lay my life on it. It 'd be him all over. That's pretty much what he thought when he left ye that strange legacy, I'll go bail. He'd do a liberal and kind thing at times, for all his bitterness and unforgiving temper."

"It's come too late, father," replied Katie, with a sad smile. "Not much chance of my ever claiming my legacy now."

"No, I never want to see that; but I'm main glad to think that the old man meant kindly to my little girl at the last, and didn't go down to his grave with a jeer at the daughter of one who'd served him as honest and true as I ha' done these thirty year. It was kindly meant of him. I felt his going above a bit, though he used to snap at me, and what I thought that jibe at you and the way I'd brought you up, in his will, hurt me a

deal. You've quick wits, you womenkind. I'd never have puzzled that out, Katie."

"I don't know that I'm right, father, but I should always like to think of it in that light. To fancy poor Sir Giles thought kindly of me to the last!"

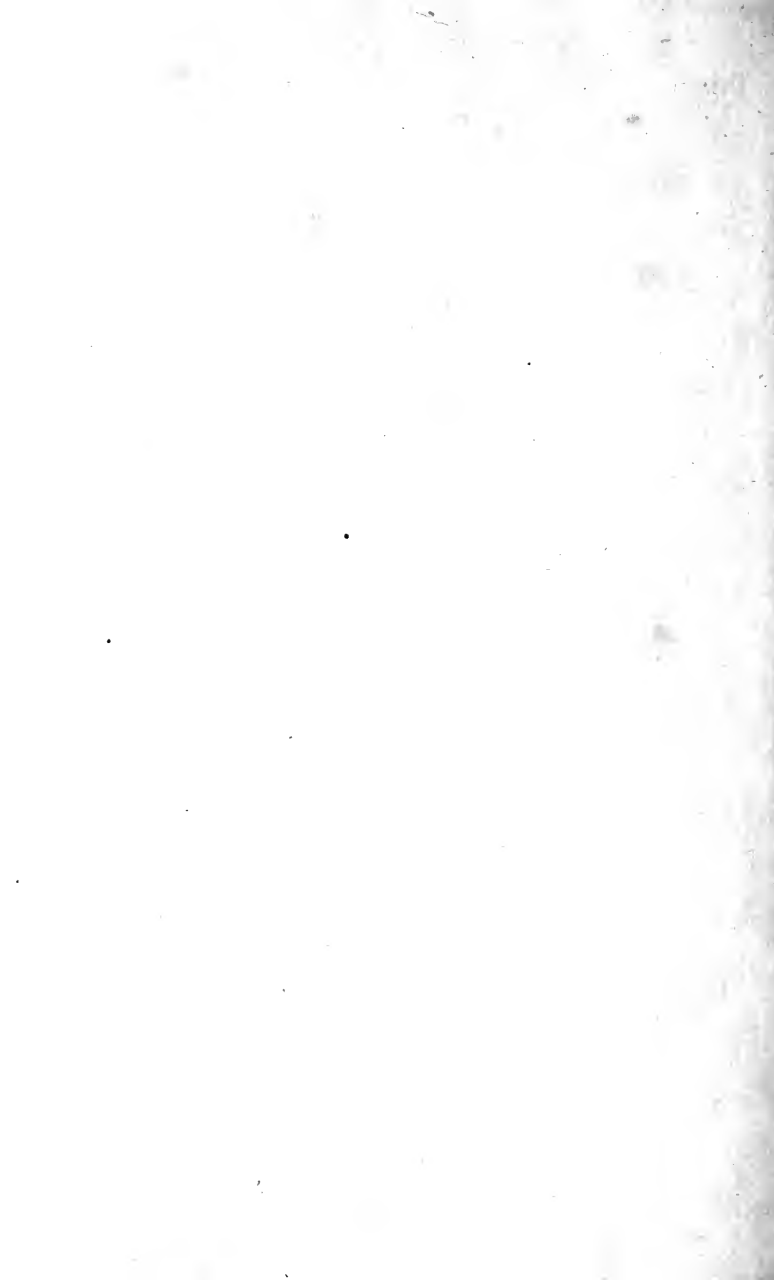
"Aye, that's the main point, lass. What's come of that Merrington lad matters nothing to you or I."

"Ah! yes, it does. I should be always glad to hear good of him. No, father, I don't want to marry him now," said Katie, in reply to an impatient gesture of her parent; "but when you've once given your whole heart to a man, it is not so easy to forget him."

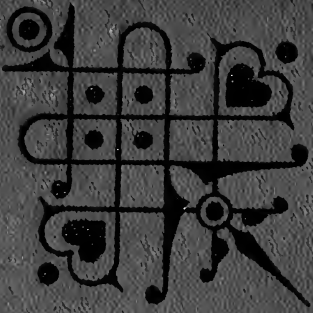
"You're a foolish wench, ever to think of him again."

"May be," said Kate, simply; "I can't help it. Foolish, of course, but we all are, where we really love."









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